

◊ DIVINE
ESSAYS

UPON THE
Following SUBJECTS:

Of

*Reading the Scrip-
tures.*

Meditation.

Self-examination.

Private Prayer.

Public Worship.

*The LORD's Sup-
per.*

By SAMUEL WALKER, A. M.
Vicar of Croft in the County of Lincoln.

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TO THE
HONORABLE
THE
Lady MONSON.

MADAM,

'TIS neither the vain
Conceit of my own
Performance, nor
the Ambition of appearing in
Print, nor the want of Bread
from the *Press*, that hath oc-
casion'd the Publication of
the following ESSAYS; but
a sincere Desire to perform
my Duty to some Persons,
which I cou'd not so effe-
a 2 ctually

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ctually discharge any other way. Verbal Discourses are mix'd with unavoidable Imperfections, attended with human Passions, very frequently slip out of the Memory, and pass away like the Morning Cloud or the early Dew: whereas set Compo-sures are deliver'd with clearer Thoughts, exacter Judgments, and a better Method; are usually receiv'd with more Candor, observ'd with less Prejudice, and may be constantly ready to be produc'd and perus'd at all convenient Opportunities of Time and Temper.

When

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When my Mind after
such Deliberations was over-
born to this Resolution,
there was, MADAM, no Dis-
pute in my Mind, under
whose Name these First-
fruits of my Labor shou'd beg
Leave to make their public
Appearance. The Grateful
Leisure I have enjoy'd in
Your very Regular Family,
and the Happy Observations
I have had the Honor to
take from those Discourses
and Examples, which I there
heard with Attention, and
with eager Inclination en-
deavor'd to imitate, have so
far form'd my Thoughts
a 3 and

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and matur'd my Judgment
upon these Subjects, as give
Your LADYSHIP a Title to
the Work.

And yet, MADAM, the
commanding Sway of ano-
ther kind of Gratitude has
been a considerable Additio-
nal Motive to this Presump-
tion. The unask'd, unmeri-
ted Favors conferr'd upon
me by my Generous *Patron*,
the Master of Your Family,
who next under GOD, has
been the immediate Instru-
ment of my Temporal Feli-
city, strike in my Soul a deep
Admiration of the goodness
of *Providence*, in casting me
under

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under the Influence of his Care, have amply rewarded my sincere, tho' imperfect Labors, and fix'd Impressions upon my Memory, as lasting as my Life.

As no Distance of Time or Place shall ever make me unmindful of my own especial Obligations; so, since 'tis highly reasonable to sow our Spiritual Things where we have reap'd our Carnal Things, and so long as the Divine Acceptance of the Widow's Mite stands recorded in the *Gospel*, to my unspeakable satisfaction, I am willing to hope this Offer

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(an unproportionable, tho' not improper return) may be kindly accepted by Your LADYSHIP, as an open Testimony of my just Regard to such extraordinary Friends. Whatever other Crimes may sensibly humble my Soul, sure I am the guilt of ceasing to put up my Prayers for such Friends will never rise up in judgment against him, who is,

M A D A M,

With the profoundest Submission
and Respect,

Your *Ladiship's* most Obedient
and Devoted Servant,

SAMUEL WALKER.

THE PREFACE.

B*T* way of Introduction, to my Design, I shall in this PREFACE make some short Remarks upon TWO PRINCIPLES, which I presume will prove powerful Considerations to engage every Christian to put in Practice all the Means to a Divine and Spiritual Life, that are here obser-v'd, and may be elsewhere prescribed. The One is, That no state of Life is, or can be, an Exemption from Temptations. The Other is, That every Christian is obliged, not only to secure his present State of Vertue, but to improve in Goodness, and go forward in Christian Perfection.

'Tis the singular Privilege of Heaven to be plac'd beyond the Reach of Temptation, and above the Fear of falling. But
since

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since this World is a state of Tryal, the whole Life of a Christian must be a various and continued Warfare. The great Enemy of the Souls of Men is very well acquainted with the Nature of the World and the Nature of Man, and Politic in suiting, and Diligent in applying all his Temptations. And there is no Part of the World, no Circumstance of Fortune, no State of Life, no Nearness of Relation, no Perfection of Vertue, but may be turn'd to our Disadvantage, if we be not perpetually upon our Guard.

Wealth wounds by Covetousness, Honors occasion Pride, Pleasures lead to Sensuality; and all deceive the Mind, and draw the Affections from things above.

The Body inclines to Lust, the Heart above all things is treacherous; through every Sense the Enemy may enter, even at our Tables we are surrounded with
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Dangers; and so the Works of Nature may destroy the Soul.

Prosperity tempts us to forget God, Adversity to murmur at Him; and whether Rich or Poor we are not secure. The Student may be drawn to unprofitable Curiosities, the Tradesman to Injustice and Circumvention, the Lawyer to dress up a bad Cause knowingly, the Physician to delay the Cure of his Patient, the Courtier to flatter the Vices of his Prince; and so every change of Station has some peculiar Temptations, besides those common to Christians in General.

Nay, Tho' Man be naturally a sociable Creature; yet that, which shou'd prove the comfort of his Life, frequently destroys the Vertue of his Mind. Company is one of the chiefest causes of Immorality. By Example or Perswasion, the nearest Relations sometimes wage
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Unnatural *War against us*. Adam was ruin'd by his Bosom Eve; and Job's Wife advis'd him to Curse God and die.

Nay farther, an elevated *Vertue* may be made subservient to a Christian's Ruin, and degenerate into *Vice*. Strange it is not, that our Souls shou'd occasionally suffer from *Vertue* and *Piety*. For 'tis plain, the Tempter takes cruel Advantages against us, from our best Dispositions and Actions. Sometimes from a Sense of our own Excellencies, he may tempt us to *Vanity*, to entertain too high an Opinion of our selves, to be too well pleas'd with them; and to be proud, when he cannot wholly draw us from a Christian Course. Sometimes from unjust Comparisons he may tempt us to too hard a Judgment of Sinners, to lose a Christian Compassion for them, to despise their Persons, to forsake their Company, to neglect their Recovery, and severely to censure and condemn their Faults. Sometimes

with

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with respect to past Attainments, he may draw us to impute the Success, more to Human Knowledge and Resolutions, than Divine Grace; and so ascribe to GOD too little, and our selves too much. And sometimes again he tempts us to take false Measures of our own Abilities, to rely upon the Stedfastness of the Mind, as a Security against future Tryals, to enter into Temptation in Confidence of a barely suppos'd Strength, and to grow careless in our Duty, for fear of being Righteous overmuch.

These are some of the Dangers to which we are expos'd in a State of Vertue. And by any One of them we may fall in a very scandalous manner. For to be proud of Vertue, to disdain Sinners, not to give GOD the Glory, and to presume upon Human Strength, are heinous Crimes in themselves, and may lead us into innumerable others.

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And now I wou'd fain know, how any Christian can reflect upon this Variety of Temptations with which he is every way surrounded, without thinking he has abundant reason to put in Practice all possible Means to secure his continuance in a Divine and Spiritual Life. Since we travel, as it were, in a Wilderness, and tread upon Ice, and there are Traps in our way where-ever we go, it is highly expedient to look round us; to step by Leisure and Degrees, and whilst we stand, to take heed, lest we fall.

The Other Principle, which I presume will prove a powerful Consideration to engage every Christian to put in Practice all the Means to a Divine and Spiritual Life, that are here offer'd, and may be elsewhere prescrib'd, is this, That every Christian is oblig'd, not only to secure his present State of Vertue, but to improve in Goodness, and go forward in Christian Perfection.

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The Truth of which Principle do's appear, from the Danger a Christian is in when he do's not go forward. For those Habits of Goodness, which we have already acquir'd, were acquir'd by particular Acts; and the Discontinuance of these Acts will naturally untwist the Habits. Yet this is not the only ill Consequence neither; for Habits of Sin will certainly strengthen, as our Habits of Goodness decay: Because the Soul of Man is an Active Principle, and will be employ'd, either on that which is Good, or on that which is Evil. 'Tis with the Moral, as it is with the Natural and Intellectual World, where Motion and Exercise renders every Part and Faculty useful and compleat. And this Consideration do's in some measure evince the Necessity of improving in Goodness, and going on unto Christian Perfection.

Besides, The Truth of this Principle do's farther appear, from the Uncertain-

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ty of what pitch of *Vertue* will be available to Salvation.

There are a sort of Persons in the World, who presumptuously talk with as much Arrogance as Ignorance, of an Absolute Assurance of Salvation, and their never falling from Grace. I must confess these are Principles, which can never be known by the Persons themselves, which can never be proved to others, and which the Scripture Precepts do plainly contradict. Because we are commanded, Philip. 2. 12. to work out our own Salvation with fear and trembling: And Gal. 6. 9. Not to be weary of well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

Indeed it was not possible in a standing written Revelation, that the Degree of *Vertue* sufficient for each particular Man's Salvation, should be expressly reveal'd. Because that depends upon a multitude
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of various Circumstances. And the same degree of Vertue which will carry one Man to Heaven, will not place another in the same state of Happiness. So that since the exact degrees of Duty, necessary for every Persons Acceptance with GOD, are not nicely known and declared, Infallible Assurance must fall to the Ground. For, as for that inward Testimony which they ascribe to the Spirit of GOD, I look upon it as a certain Suggestion of Satan, to lull their Souls into a fatal Security.

But suppose there was a Revelation, which expressly declar'd, that, when I arriv'd to such a degree of Goodness, I need do no more and shou'd certainly be sav'd, I am not absolutely sure yet. Because the Heart of Man is deceitful above all things. The Devil and my own inflamed Passions may infatuate and blind my Judgment; and so I may be easily led into Mistakes, and my Mind flatter'd

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with a conceit of my being better than I really am. For we are apt to be very partial, and bias'd to pass a too favorable Construction upon our own Actions.

From this Stating of the Case, there seems to be sufficient Reason to cast down the vain Confidence of some, and prevent the Neglect of improving in Goodness in others, from a fond Conceit, that either they cannot or need not be more perfect than they are. The best Conclusion, and the most natural Inference, that can be drawn from the former Observations, is, to endeavor throughout our whole Lives to increase in Vertue and Piety, and be as good Christians as we can. In a matter of so great Importance as Eternal Salvation, we ought to make our Title as secure as possible. We may easily do too little, but can never do too much; and therefore we are oblig'd. to do all we can.

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Moreover, We are oblig'd to improve in Goodness and go forward in Christian Perfection, from the Various and Daily Changes in the occurrences of Life. For every new change of Life has some peculiar Duties attending it, which we are oblig'd to perform; and every new alteration of Affairs gives a fair Opportunity to exercise and improve some Vertues, which we had not before acquir'd or perfected. Poverty or Riches, Health or Sickness, Youth or Old Age, Marriage or a Single Life, a Family or a Paternal Relation, Success or Disappointments in the World, lay various Obligations to different Duties. Every Days Revolution gives some fresh Occasions of becoming or doing Good. Now since this is the Nature of the World, and the Condition of Man, and will continue so, we may without Enlargement readily perceive, how much we are oblig'd to add to our former Vertues, all

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present and future Improvements whatsoever.

Nay farther, Such an Improvement in Goodness, and such a going forward in Christian Perfection, is ennobling Human Nature, and repairing the unhappy Breaches of Adam's Transgression, and coming near to the life of the perfect Saints in Heaven. It argues a generous Disposition of Mind, a pious and innocent Ambition of Soul, and meets with universal Admiration and Esteem, and discovers a grateful Return for the inestimable Kindness of our SAVIOR.

And 'tis as Useful and Beneficial to the World, as it is really excellent in it self. For since Man in the Conduct of Life is much govern'd by Imitation, and Example often has a greater Influence than Precept, there cannot be the least Reason to doubt, but the more Illustrious

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ous the Examples are, the better Guides they prove to others in the way to Heaven. For they are like the Lights of the World, which shine both far and near. They are like Candles put on a Candlestick, which direct the Steps of a whole Family.

But where Sight and Intimacy may both be had, nothing can be of more Advantage to perfect Vertue, and compleat a Religious Life. For Persons of such Improvements in the Knowledge and Practice of the Divine Laws, are the best able to instruct the Understanding, and direct the Conscience, and teach the Methods of attaining Vertue, and conquering Vice. They are the best able to inform us what Difficulties we shall meet with, how they must be surmounted, and by what steps to proceed with Safety and Success unto Perfection. And surely it must be a strong Engagement to improve in Goodness, to consider, that
such

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such a Growth is excellent in it self, and provoketh unto good Works.

Lastly, The Different Mansions and Degrees of Glory in a Future State, lay a strong Obligation upon all Christians to improve in Goodness, and go forward in Christian Perfection.

In that Description of another World, which we receive from the Gospel, we are expressly taught, that the Saints in Heaven shall Excel one another in Glory. The Knowledge of the Nature of the next Life is obscure and imperfect, even under the Advantages of the Revelation of the Son of GOD: yet care has been taken clearly to instruct us in this mighty Difference. CHRIST, and his Great Apostle St. Paul, do particularly insist upon it.

But to what End hath GOD appointed and declar'd the different Degrees

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grees of Glory in another World? To no other End doubtless but to raise an Emulation amongst his Creatures, and a Strife to excel in that which is Good. Go on then, O Christian, and prosper. So long as thou hast Crowns and Scepters in View, be not content to sit down with that mean Thought of being the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Meditate on the different degrees, which the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of GOD has provided and discover'd. And let these Meditations animate thy Noble Spirit to out-vie the Lustre of thy Fellow-Christians.

Having thus made some few Remarks on the Two Principles I mention'd, I shall now proceed to my propos'd Design: and that is, to offer some proper Means, not only for securing our present Vertue, but towards becoming compleat Christians. I shall not enlarge on the Nature and Method of the WORK. To the Candid

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Judgment of the World I entirely leave it; earnestly desiring the Reader's Goodness favorably to interpret and correct those Faults which his Wisdom may very probably discover. Tho' it may be attended with Variety of Censures, and a multitude of Imperfections; this public Profession I can truly make, that I have compos'd the Discourses according to my Sincere Judgment, and presum'd to publish them under the Security of a Good Intention. And as the sense of this Double Reflection gives me real Satisfaction in my own Conscience; so it will, I hope, thro' the Merits of my SAVIOR, make my Labor approv'd by that GOD who is the Searcher of Hearts.

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ESSAY

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ESSAY I.

OF

Reading the SCRIPTURES.

SECT. I.

The Solemn Engagements to the Reading of the SCRIPTURES.

MY Intention is to be a GUIDE to a Divine and Spiritual Life, and to offer some Means proper to this end; I shall therefore begin with *that* of Reading the Holy SCRIPTURES, as first and chiefly Useful to carry on so Important a Design with Success. Because St. Paul does teach us, 2 Tim. 3. 16, 17. That the Scripture is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness; that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnish'd unto all good Works. And the Psalmist gives it the high Commendation of

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directing us how to live and walk so long as we continue in this World, when he says, *Psal. 119. 105. Thy Word is a lamp unto my Feet, and a light unto my Paths.*

By sincere and impartial Persons the *Privilege* of a written Revelation must be justly esteem'd an inestimable Blessing. Because it frees Mankind from the miserable Defects, and almost unavoidable Corruptions of *Oral Tradition*. It must moreover be acknowledg'd an Additional Felicity to have this written Revelation translated from the Original into the common Language of each particular Country, and as freely permitted to be perus'd. Because every Person may then judge for himself in the necessary Points of Faith and Practice, and believe and observe no farther than he has Divine Authority for his Guide.

Now these are Blessings which we of this Nation by the Care and Goodness of Divine Providence do at present enjoy. For we have a Written Revelation, translated into our own Language, and so freely offer'd to the perusal of *All*, that the People, as well as the Priests, may truly call the *Bibles* their own. And
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I am sure this Liberty which is afforded, lays a *strong Obligation* to read the *Sacred Scripture*, and will render us *inexcusable* if we do not.

Especially if we add, *The Dignity* of the *Author*: Which will be another *Obligation* to study and read the *Scriptures*.

Prophecy came not in old time by the *Will* of *Man*; but *Holy Men* of *God* spake and wrote as they were moved by the *Holy Ghost*. And, all *Scripture* is given by the *Inspiration* of *God*. The *Prophets* and *Apostles* were only *secondary Instruments*: but 'tis *God* that speaks to us by their *Writings*, and the *Scriptures* are *Originally Divine*.

And surely then, when it is *God* that speaks, we ought to give the most earnest heed. Let a *Solomon* in his *Natural Capacity* ascend the *Throne* and open his *Lips*, the *People* attentively listen and admire: And shall we not listen, when a *greater than Solomon*, the *Lord Jehovah* makes a *Declaration* of his *Will*? 'Tis the *Learning*, *Piety*, and *Judgment* of *Humane Authors*, which recommend their *Books* to the *Reading* of *Mankind*: And shall we not read, when a *God* of

Infinite Wisdom and Perfect Holiness, when a God who is Truth it self, above Mistakes, infallible in his Judgment, graciously condescends to reveal his Mind unto his Creatures, and to give it them too in Writing? A deep Veneration is paid to the *Proclamation of a Prince*, and a pleasing regard to the Letter of a Friend: And doubtless the same, nay greater, Veneration and Regard ought to be given to the Word of God, who is the KING of Kings, and the highest *Benefactor*. Certainly, considering the Divinity of its Original, we can never open it too often, nor Read it too well, nor Reverence it too much.

Besides, The *Scriptural Revelation* was wholly design'd to instruct Mankind in the Will of God, and has been faithfully convey'd down to us on purpose that we might read and know it. It contains the most Noble and Excellent Truths; Truths, which bear an immediate Relation to us; Truths, wherein our Wellfare, Temporal and Everlasting, is most nearly concern'd. And upon these Considerations, we ought in all reason and Conscience to set a part large Portions of our time for the Study of it. The Neglect and Contempt of such a Search is an ungrateful Return for the most endearing

dearing Message, an intolerable Slight of the Tidings of Salvation, and an unnatural Opposition to our own Felicity.

Nay, farther; Notwithstanding the native *Simplicity* and *Perspicuity* of Scripture in those things which are absolutely necessary to Salvation, there is withall such a *Majesty* and *Depth* throughout the whole, as requires a constant perusal, and the most attentive Mind to understand and adore. There is enough to exercise the Learned, to instruct the Vulgar, and edify *All*. We are soon at the bottom of the thoughts of Men; Humane Inventions are quickly fathom'd: But here the more narrowly we search, the more Discoveries we make. Every time a Person reads the Scripture with Diligence and Application, his Understanding is improv'd. And so far is he from being tir'd in his pursuit, that he is inflamed to proceed. And as these are Circumstances very becoming the Infinite Wisdom of God; so they are Engagements upon *us* to hold the Scriptures in great Reverence, and read them with a proportionable Attention and Constancy.

S E C T. II.

The Benefits of this Reading to the Mind.

THE Reading of the Holy Scriptures is very beneficial to the Soul, as it instructs the Mind in the Nature of God, the Methods of Divine Providence, the Redemption of Mankind, the Nature of this World, and a future Estate.

First, The Reading of the Holy Scriptures is beneficial to the Soul, as it instructs the Mind in the *Nature* of God.

The Being of a God is the Foundation of Religious Worship. *For he that cometh to God, must believe That He is.* Next to the Existence, the Nature of God is to be consider'd. For 'tis almost equal, to have no Notion of God at all, as such a Notion as is false and unworthy of Him.

As the *Existence* of a God is readily gather'd from the Frame of the Universe, and the consent of Nations: so his *Nature* is best known and most gloriously display'd by that Account which we find in the Holy Scriptures. For there we are taught,

taught, That He is a Spirit; a Spirit which was from everlasting without beginning, and will be to everlasting without end; That this eternal Spirit is absolutely perfect, infinite in Wisdom, Power, Goodness, Holiness, Truth, Justice, and Mercy, did necessarily exist of Himself, was the Cause of the Existence of all other things, and wants no degree of Excellency and Perfection.

This is the Notion of a God, which the Scriptures offer to the Mind of Man; A Notion in Characters so Lively and Agreeable to the most improved Reason, as the Mind can easily acquiesce in. And 'tis a Notion which tends exceedingly to the Advantage of the Soul, and the Peace and Satisfaction of Conscience; Because the Manner of Adoration will be according to the *Apprehensions* of the Divine Nature, And these Apprehensions set us right in the Performance of Divine Worship: Because Honour and Reverence, Love and Fear, a Filial Respect, and an awful Regard, are the Natural Products of such Conceptions. By these we are directed to avoid the Extremes of Boldness and Superstition, Presumption and Despair, and are clearly taught neither to make Religion

ligion too easy, nor yet too burthen-
some.

The want of these Conceptions in the Pagan World, was the Rise and Progress of the Plurality of Deities, which were adored, and prov'd the Unhappy Cause of those abominable Rites and barbarous Ceremonies which were ridiculously observ'd in the Worship of their Gods. Either God was a Fury, or such a One as themselves: And such a wretched prevailing *Ignorance* of the Divine Nature fill'd their Minds with Perplexities and Doubts, Fears and Delusions, *how* to worship him, and *what* to offer by way of Atonement and Expiation to Him. This Consideration proves the *Excellency* and *Use* of the Holy Scriptures, as giving us the true and clear Information of what God is.

Secondly, The Reading of the *Holy Scriptures* is very beneficial to the Soul, as it instructs the Mind in the *Methods* of DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

As we there read of God's creating the World, and the Formation of Man: so we are also instructed in the Notice He takes of Humane Affairs; upon what
Term

Terms to expect his Favour, and what will occasion his severe Vengeance. Which things are very useful to all Persons in every State of Life, and in every Age of the World.

When we seriously consider the *History* of the Lives of the Patriarchs, Prophets and Apostles, and other Eminent Examples of Goodness: When we observe the particular Promises which were made to them, what a watchful Providence did constantly attend them, and how suprisingly they were supported in all their Tryals; 'tis both just and natural, as well as useful, to learn from hence, with what Temper to submit to the Miseries of this Life, to whom to fly for Succour in time of Need, and that *all things work together for the good* of those who love God. Noah was preserv'd in the Ark, when the whole World was destroy'd by a Flood. Lot was deliver'd from the Destruction of Sodom, when the whole City was laid in Ashes by Fire from Heaven. Abraham was reliev'd in a strange Country, when he obey'd, not knowing whither he went. God follow'd Joseph into Egypt, and made him the Second in Pharaoh's Kingdom. In the time of great Dearth and Famine, Elijah was
fed

fed by Ravens, and a poor Widow. A hundred Prophets were fed in a Cave with Bread and Water by *Obadiah*, when *Jezabel* sought to take away their *Lives*. The Devil was defeated in the *Calamities* of *Job*; and *Job's* latter End was greater than his Beginning. The Mercies, Deliverances and Consolations, which attended the *Royal Prophet*, were indeed innumerable. The Apostles of *Christ* were troubled on every side, yet not distress'd; perplex'd, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken. Whilst on the contrary, the Wickedness of particular Persons has been pursu'd and overtaken by *Divine Justice*, and their Overthrow left as a standing Monument of God's Displeasure against Sin to future Ages.

These things were written for our Admonition, upon whom the Ends of the World are come. And they do naturally tend to promote Faith and Patience, and do induce us to love God above all things, and fear nothing more than offending Him by *Disobedience*. Every Person, who reads the Scripture, and considers what he reads, cannot but make these Observations from the Methods of Divine Providence to particular Persons.

Again,

Again, The Methods of Divine Providence may now be consider'd with respect to *Publick Bodies* and *Societies* of Men; and those too both of *Church* and *State*. For there are remarkable Instances to be observ'd in Each.

When the *Jews* were Renow'd and Illustrious for Vertue, and excell'd in Faith and Piety, they were a happy and flourishing People. But as soon as they began to murmur and decline, and forsake the ways of Vertue, God gave them up to the Will of their Enemies, and they that hated them were Lords over them. Thus he constantly dealt with them: And by this succeeding Ages are taught, that Vertue exalteth a Nation, and God's Judgments will go abroad in the World, when the Inhabitants of the Earth will not learn Righteousness.

And his Government over the *Church* has been at least as remarkable as that over *States* and *Kingdoms*. The *Jewish* Church did undergo several Captivities, and the *Christian Church* noted Persecutions; but the *Gates of Hell* never prevail'd against it. The Candlestick has
been

been remov'd from one Country to another, but the Sins of the Inhabitants were the Cause; and the Candle it self, which is the Gospel of *Christ*, was never wholly extinct. From this view which the Scriptures give of the Government of the Church, we may perceive and learn, That God will keep his Promise for ever in protecting his Church, that he will never suffer his Truth to fail, that the Enemies of it shall only imagine a vain thing, that it is foolish to oppose the Counsels of God, and that if we wou'd have our *Church* more lasting than theirs, we must live better than they liv'd.

To one that studies the *Bible* with any tolerable Application of Mind, the Wisdom and Goodness, the Justice and Holiness of Providence to Mankind, as Men, as sociable Creatures, as Members of a Church, are evident matters of Fact. The Knowledge of the Methods of Divine Government is very Useful and Instructive; because it lets us see, how to secure the Protection, and avoid the Judgments of Heaven, and has a strong influence in the promoting of Faith and good Manners.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, The Reading of the Holy Scriptures is very Beneficial to the Soul, as it instructs the Mind in the Redemption of Mankind.

This runs as a Vein throughout the whole *Bible*, and is the chief subject of Scriptural Revelation. There we read of the unhappy Fall of Man, and the welcome Promise of a Saviour to be born. There we have this Promise more plainly repeated to the Patriarchs. The Typical, Figurative and Prophetical places do generally centre in his Person. *Unto Him give all the Prophets witness*, with respect to the Circumstances of his Birth, as to Person, Tribe, Family, Time and Place, and also with respect to his Doctrine, Miracles, Life, Death and Glorification.

If we come to examine the *New Testament*, we find all this exactly completed. We are from thence taught, That the *Messiah*, promis'd by God and foretold in the *Jewish Law*, was the Son of God; That, *when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a Woman*; That this Saviour did many mighty Works, and preach'd most Comfortable and Heavenly Doctrines; That he

he died a Sacrifice upon the Cross for Sin, and rose again from the Dead; That he is now set down at the right Hand of God, and there continues our Mediator and Intercessor; That he sendeth down his Holy Spirit in answer to our Prayers; That in his own appointed time he will come again to judge both the Quick and the Dead; That he will reward the Righteous with everlasting Felicity, and punish the Wicked with as lasting a Punishment; And that then there will be an end of his Mediatorship, and he will deliver up the Kingdom unto God, even the Father.

'Tis impossible to read the Scriptures without being inform'd of these Truths. Such an Information is extremely beneficial to the Soul: Because it gives us a true Notion of the Christian Religion, the Design of *Christ's* Coming, how God was reconcil'd to us, and upon what terms we are now to expect Salvation.

Nay, the Knowledge of these Truths is so Essential to Religion, that no one can be indeed a Christian, who is not fully acquainted with them. Every particular Article is easy to be found by a diligent Observer, and easy to be under-
stood

stood by the meanest Reader: And the Belief of the whole is absolutely inecessary to Salvation. Ignorance in other matters may be safe, excusable and dispens'd with; but to be ignorant of these Points concerning the *Redemption*, to be ignorant of them under the Capacity and Means of Instruction, is to hazard Salvation, and endanger Eternal Happiness.

Fourthly, The Reading of the Holy Scriptures is very Beneficial to the Soul, as it instructs the Mind in the Nature of *this* World, and a *future* State.

As to this World, 'tis declar'd to be Uncertain, Vexatious, Empty and Short. Life it self, the Foundation of all worldly Comforts, is expos'd to a thousand Dangers both from *within* and *without*, and requires the utmost Care and Skill to keep it, even in a tolerable Condition, and will in a short time naturally expire. And by this Description we are taught, That Happiness cannot be compleat upon Earth: By this we are taught, *not to lay up Treasures upon Earth*, not to set our Affections on any thing here below: By this we are taught, how to use the World, what Estimate to set upon it, with what Love to pursue its Blessings, and

and with what Patience to bear its Crosses.

As to the *other* World, it must be confess'd, that no more of that can possibly be known than is discover'd by Revelation, and that *that* Discovery which Revelation has now made is imperfect, to what it is in it self, and we shall find it. But there is enough discover'd to answer the Ends of a Holy Life, and enflame our desires after it. There we shall have *Bodies* free from that Pain and Misery, from those Diseases, Infirmities, and Death, with which they are now attended. There our *Understandings* shall have a clear and distinct Knowledge of all necessary Truths. There our *Wills* and *Affections* will be kept in the greatest Rectitude, without the least Inclination or Temptation to Evil. There we shall enjoy the happiest *Society* without the alloy of disturbing Passions: And, There this Felicity will be of an *Eternal* Duration.

This is the Account which the Scriptures give of the Nature of that Happiness, which is to be enjoy'd in the other World; an Account extremely moving; tho' the half of it is not told us. And altho' our Saviour condescends to describe

cribe the Happiness of Heaven by comparing it to those things, which are the highest Felicities of this present State; yet this is only in compliance with our narrow and confin'd Powers, which are not able to bear that Transcendent Glory, but under such sensible Representations. For the other World comprehends nothing but what is Sublime, Chaste, Pure and Intellectual.

In short, The Scriptures inform us, of the *Certainty* of a future State, and of several ravishing *Particulars* of that State. And the rest of it may be express'd in these two Generals, That there we shall be very happy with God in the Enjoyment of a Reward proportionable to our Vertues, and that Heaven contains all that abundant, compleat, and universal Good, which Divine Celestial Minds can wish for, desire, or take delight in.

And what can be more Useful, than this Knowledge? 'Tis useful to despise the Pleasures of this World; to support us under the Miseries of Humane Life; to arm us against the Fears and Terrors of Death; to excite in us a Desire to be dissolv'd, and to engage us by Holiness to make a wise and sure Preparation for it.

S E C T. III.

How necessary this Reading is to a Divine and Spiritual Life.

THE Reading of the Scriptures is necessary to this end, as it prescribes to our *Thoughts*, guides our *Tongues*, directs our *Practice*, raises our *Devotions*, and offers *Abilities* to assist, and *Motives* to encourage our Obedience.

First, 'Tis necessary to a Divine and Spiritual Life, as it prescribes to our *Thoughts*.

There is a Notion as false as wicked, too readily entertain'd by some ignorant Christians, that provided they refrain from criminal Words and Actions, their Thoughts are free, and they may indulge them as intemperately as they please. But the Divine Laws certainly extend to our Thoughts, set bounds to our Desires, regulate our Affections, prescribe to our Fancies, and forbid the least voluntary Motions and Inclinations to any thing that is evil. *Moses* saith expressly, *Exod. 20. 17. Thou shalt not covet.* *David* declares, *Psal. 66. 18. If I incline unto wickedness*

kedness with my Heart, the Lord will not hear me. Solomon in one place, Prov. 4. 23. commands, To keep the Heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of Life: And in another place, chap. 15. 26. tells us, That the Thoughts of the Wicked are an Abomination unto the Lord. The Prophets in abundance of places complain of the Jews, and give it as a heavy Charge against them, that their Hearts were far from God. Our Saviour in effect informs us, Matth. 5. 28. That a Rape may be committed in the Fancy, and Adultery by a wanton glance: And in Mark. 7. 23. That the evil things within a Man defile the Man: And in the beginning of Mat. 6. He endeavours to secure the good Intentions of his Disciples. St. Peter calls upon Simon, Acts 8. 22. To repent, that the Thoughts of his Heart might be forgiven him. St. Paul requires us, 2 Cor. 10. 5. to bring into captivity every Thought unto the Obedience of Christ. And St. John does instruct us, 1 John 3. 15. That whosoever hateth his Brother is a Murderer.

Tis plain, that the Reading of the Scriptures does lay before us the Obligations we lie under to the Government of the Thoughts. The Knowledge of

these Obligations will accordingly excite us to such a Regulation. And the Regulation of the Thoughts does naturally tend to the Advancement of a Divine and Spiritual Life. For such a Regulation of the Thoughts strikes at the very Root of Sin, at the Source and Fountain from whence it springs, and where the Devil does chiefly lay his Snares. To think of Sin with Approbation and Delight, is a *real* Pollution of the Soul, shou'd it proceed no farther. But it is not only evil in it self, but *tends* to Evil also. *For out of the heart proceed evil Thoughts, Matth. 15. 19. Murders, Adulteries, Fornications, Thefts, False witness, Blasphemies.* As he, that thinks like a Fool, can never act like a Wise-man; so an Evil-man out of the evil Treasure of his Heart can never bring forth that which is good.

Now that which stops the beginnings of Sin and destroys it in its birth, must be of vast use to a holy Life. Because it keeps the Mind from real Pollutions, and prevents many outward Disorders, and 'tis the first part of Vertue to forsake Vice. The Government of the Thoughts, which the Scriptures oblige us to, does effectually perform this, as it destroys all
inward

inward Approbations of Sin, and casts out envious, unchaste, revengeful, proud, murmuring and impious Thoughts. And therefore it tends to a divine and spiritual Life.

Besides, This obliged Government of the Thoughts tends to this End, by fixing the Mind upon such noble Objects and useful Truths, as prove the *beginning* and *perfection* of Vertue. Our Actions will be of the same nature with our Thoughts. *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good.* A regular frame of Mind, a Mind wrapt up in deep Contemplations, in Contemplations on God, his Ways and Precepts, is the highest Perfection of the Soul. 'Tis what the Celestial Minds, the unbodied Spirits above are daily conversant about. 'Tis what is acceptable to God, what He eminently respects, and can peculiarly judge. And 'tis what influences our Practice upon all occasions. The seed of Vertue is sown in the Mind, nourish'd and ripen'd by good Thoughts. 'Tis plain by all these consequences how necessary the Reading of the Scriptures is to a good Life.

Secondly, The Reading of the Scriptures is necessary to a Divine and Spirit-

tual Life, as it guides our *Tongue*: which being an *unruly Member*, does justly fall under the reach of Government. And accordingly the Laws of God prescribe to it, as well as to the Thoughts. And we are told, *Matth. 12. 37. By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

The Scriptures direct the *Tongue*, as to those *Vices* from which it is to refrain, and as to those *Uses* in which it ought to be employ'd. And by these two ways it is to be kept within its due bounds and measures.

As to the *Vices* from which it is to refrain, the Scriptures are very particular. Execrable Oaths, and Discourses reflecting upon God, are positively forbidden. Not to *bear false witness against our Neighbour*, is the express Law of the Immortal God. To *keep our Tongues from evil, and our Lips that they speak no guile*, is the advice of the Psalmist. 'Tis the command of the Apostle, to forbear unjust Censures, and talking of other Men's Lives and Business by way of slander and detraction. *Filthiness, and foolish speaking, and jesting which is not convenient, and all corrupt communications,*

cations, are commanded *never to proceed out of our mouths.*

The Tongue is also directed by the Scriptures, as to those *Uses* in which it ought to be employ'd. And here we are call'd upon, to praise God, to honour his holy Name, to worship Him, to speak *the truth from our hearts*, to let our Discourses be with such gravity, decency and honesty, as becomes a Christian; to talk on excellent subjects, which may tend to *Edification, minister grace to the hearers*, and make them wiser and better. As the *Privilege* of Speech qualifies us to become sociable Creatures; so the *Exercise* of it must be the glory of God, and the common good of the whole Society as well as our selves. The Scriptures, directing and obliging us to answer these ends, advance a divine and spiritual Life in this great branch of Duty, the Government of the Tongue.

Thirdly, The Reading of the Scriptures is necessary to a divine and spiritual Life, as it directs our *Practice*.

'Tis the Psalmist's question, *Psal. 119, 9. Wherewithall shall a young man cleanse his way?* And he answers in the words

immediately following, *Even by ruling himself according to God's Word.* For certainly the *Bible* gives us the best Directions for a good Life of any Book in the World, and the *Gospel* the most elevated Rules of Morality of any Institution from the beginning of the Creation: And from both we are inform'd of the nature of Sin, and the nature of Vertue, with all their tendencies and effects, in the most lively Characters.

There is nothing which a Christian ought to avoid, there is nothing which a Christian ought to do, in the great parts of his Duty to God, Himself and his Neighbour, but what is set down with that Perspicuity and Clearness, as became the infinite Goodness of God, who wou'd have all Men come to the knowledge and practice of the Truth. This Consideration does indeed demonstrate how the study of the Scriptures does promote a good Life. For the first step to Practical Religion is to distinguish Good and Evil. Because Practice without Knowledge is impossible, at least impossible to be Vertue.

Moreover, The Scriptures give, not only the *clearest*, but the *fullest*, and most perfect

fect Rules of Life; Rules, as in those general Points wherein all Men are concern'd, so in the peculiar Duties which belong to every state of Life. Kings and Subjects, Priests and People, Rich and Poor, Ignorant and Learned, Single and Married, Parents and Children, Masters and Servants, Superiors and Inferiors, have all their several Duties laid before them, and are plainly taught what they are to do in their Lives, in the various Conditions of this World, and in that great variety of Events, which are met with here, and with that multitude of different Talents with which Mankind are intrusted and endow'd. Such Directions tend to purify Humane Nature, and restore the Image of God to our Souls, which consists in true Righteousness and Holiness. And if we wou'd aspire and attain to a divine and spiritual Life, we must be frequently conversant in the Holy Scriptures, where these Directions are so expressely and so fully delivered.

Fourthly, The Reading of the Scriptures is necessary to a divine and spiritual Life, as it raises our Devotions.

When the Body is duly qualify'd to assist

assist the operations of the Soul, no Instrument, no Book can raise the Mind to so noble a pitch, such an elevated frame, as the study of the *Bible*. Accordingly this hath prevail'd with some, to make it their constant, their daily business to read some part of the Scriptures, before they have proceeded to offer their Devotions, as preparatory to the better performance of that truly divine and spiritual Exercise. The happy Experience of such will tell us, what a mighty influence this practice hath had in respect of Piety. And from this influence they have recommended the use of it to others.

But of all the parts of the sacred Scriptures, none does more directly and effectually advance this end, than the *Psalms of David*. I believe there are not any who have been the least accustom'd to converse with God in Prayer, and have made the Book of *Psalms* part of their Meditation, but will joyn with me in this Assertion. The melting Words and moving Expressions, the lofty Thoughts and joyful Praises, there to be met with in great abundance, are sufficient to kindle a sacred Fire within, and Extasies and Transports of Holiness. That Person must be wretchedly stupid, or wofully incon-

inconsiderate, whom this Book will not raise to a mortified and heavenly Disposition.

As the Usefulness of the Scriptures, in respect of Piety, is prov'd from *Testimony*; so 'tis apparent from *Reason*, why it shou'd be so. There we receive right Apprehensions of the Nature and Perfections of God, how glorious, how wise, how powerful, how good, and how holy a Being He is. There we have Rules offer'd to pass a true judgment of our spiritual Condition; and by those Rules we are taught how great Sinners we are, and what absolute Necessity there is to beg God's Pardon, and implore his Mercy. There we are inform'd of our Dependence upon God, for all things that we want; of the Obligations we have to pray, and of the Assurance of Acceptance from the Promise of God, if we offer up our Prayers in the Name of *Christ*. The Reading of the Scriptures will furnish our Minds with such Principles as these; such Principles will naturally excite in us a true Disposition for Prayer; and Prayer is one of the highest Exercises of a divine and spiritual Life.

Fifthly and lastly, The Reading of the Scrip-

Scriptures is necessary to a divine and spiritual Life, as it offers us *Motives* to encourage, and *Abilities* to assist our Obedience.

As to the *Motives*, we are told, That *Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the Life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.* But the chief Scripture *Motives*, are, the Love of God, the prospect of a future Judgment, the hopes of Heaven, and the terrors of Hell. Nothing more important can be afforded to persuade, to excite to a compliance with God's Laws and the terms of the *Gospel*. If these fail of their expected, their designed Influence, what can, what will prevail with such wretched dulness, such harden'd Hearts.

And to compleat all, there are *Abilities* given and promis'd to assist us to obey. And without these, all the Rules in the World, all the *Motives* of Heaven, wou'd be in vain. *We are unable of our selves to do any thing as of our selves, even so much as to think a good thought; But our sufficiency is of God.* The Holy Spirit is promis'd to co-operate with our Endeavours, *to help our infirmities, and to supply us in all our spiritual wants* and

and dangers. Upon our pious Requests Grace will be distributed in such a measure, as will be sufficient to govern our Thoughts, and guide our Tongue, and direct our Practice, and raise our Devotions, and make all the Motives of God effectual upon our Hearts and Lives. All these things the Scriptures do promise and afford, and so are necessary to a divine and spiritual Life.

S E C T. IV.

Rules for the profitable Reading of the Scriptures.

THE Rules and Directions that I shall offer shall be as few in number, and those as briefly consider'd, as I possibly can, that so they may be the easier remember'd, and the sooner reduc'd to practice.

First then, If we desire to profit by the Scriptures, we must read them with *Frequency*.

Tho' the *Bible* be in a small Volume, and therefore readily obtain'd with a little

little charge; tho', when procur'd, it may be look'd into daily without expence of time from other worldly concerns: Yet without incurring the censure of uncharitableness, I may venture to assert, that it is miserably neglected by the generality of Christians. Perhaps now and then on a Sunday, when they have nothing else to do, or no company comes to visit them, they may chance to open the sacred Book: whilst all the Week after, 'tis laid aside and entirely neglected. Shou'd I appeal to the Consciences of most Christians, and wou'd they but speak sincerely what they know of themselves, I am sure they must confess this to be true.

But to such as are guilty of so visible a neglect, I cannot but say, that a constant and daily perusal of the Holy Scriptures is their indispensable Duty. And that they have not, cannot have any manner of excuse for the omission. They cannot plead want of *Obligations*: Because they are commanded to be read, and useful and necessary for a Christian Life. They cannot plead want of *Time*: Because every Person may and does spare more time from the necessary business of his station, than is indeed necessary to perform

perform this Duty. For half an hour, or an hour in a day, might be in some measure sufficient to answer these Obligations. And for the ordering this small portion of time to answer this great end, 'tis my particular Advice, that a little part of the Scriptures be read every Morning, *before* we enter upon our private Devotions, and every Night *before* we offer our Evening Sacrifice. For this Reading will prepare us for Prayer, and Prayer will engage God to *open our eyes to see the wondrous things of his Law.*

Secondly, To make our Frequency in the Scriptures profitable to us, we must read with Diligence.

When we talk of Reading the Scriptures, we do not mean the running them over hastily and transiently, as we may, and sometimes do a common History; but reading them over and over again. And that with such Attention, as becomes the important matters which are contain'd therein: with such Attention, as may make us masters of all the noble thoughts which are there deliver'd: with such Attention, as will bring us to remember and understand every part which does concern us.

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By this close View we shall be able to distinguish between Truths of *less* concernment, and Truths of *absolute* necessity. By this close View, we shall really discover the Nature and Consequences of things, what are expressly *set down* in Holy Writ, and what may fairly be *drawn* from it. By this close View, such a discovery will make a deep and lasting impression upon the Mind, such an impression as will reduce us to a dutiful and practical *Obedience*.

Whereas without such a serious Application of thought, all our reading will be to no purpose. For tho' things necessary to Salvation may be easily understood; yet to understand them, a strict and careful Attendance is requir'd: Because the plainest truths may be overlook'd. Open they are to him that *searches*; but to the *negligent*, plainness and obscurity are both alike.

Thirdly, To make the frequent and diligent searching of the Scriptures profitable to us, we must read them with *Sincerity* and *Impartiality*.

'Tis the direction of St. *James*, *ch. 1. 21.*
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To lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word of truth. By which Qualification for studying the Scriptures, he means an honest and true Design of being inform'd in matters of Faith, and Rules of Practice. To search Truth in such an unprejudiced manner, is that happy Disposition, which our Savior requires, and which will not fail of success: Because by the help of such a Disposition, a Person is resolv'd to receive, what upon inquiry shall be found necessary, whether it be for, or against his private Inclinations and Opinions. And a Person of this Resolution, is naturally qualify'd to apprehend Truth in its naked and proper Colours.

Nay, the Providence and Promise of God is concern'd to preserve such a Person, from fundamental Mistakes. Or if he chance to be mistaken, and to espouse some Errors, which are dangerous in *themselves*, 'tis my opinion, they will not however prove damnable to *him*.

Read then the Scriptures with Frequency, read them with Diligence; but read them with Impartiality also. The Reception and Judgment of Truth is various,

as we are well or ill dispos'd. And as the Influence of a good Disposition is extremely beneficial in a search after Truth: so Prejudice and Affection have contrary effects: Which is very apparent from the Experience of the World, in matters both of Practice and Opinion.

When a Person is resolv'd to maintain and pursue a vicious course, in any particular instance, and comes with this *Prejudice* to study the Scriptures, no wonder that he misses of Truth: because this *Prejudice* will sway him to overlook those places, which are expressly against his way of living; and to insist upon some other passages, if he can find them, which may confirm or favour that which he beforehand desires and resolves to encourage. Or, if he falls upon some Texts which are doubtful, alas, Inclination will immediately bias the Judgment to pass a too favourable Construction.

The power of such Prejudices, is as great in matters of *Opinion*. For when a Person, who has espous'd the principles of a party from Education, Interest or Passion, comes to search the holy Word of God, every bare sound of a Scripture-phrase which does but favour them, shall
more

more effectually prevail to confirm the Man in his Opinion, than the most evident Texts against them shall be to draw him from them. Notions are first form'd, and then the Scriptures must be read, and then 'tis easy to find their own idle Fancies in the *Bible*. From hence sprung all the Heresies in the Ancient Church. No other account can be given, why some in our own Nation at this day, blindly entertain many false and pernicious Doctrines. And thus Men fasten their own Follies upon the Infallible Spirit of God.

I must confess, to me this Method seems exceedingly preposterous. Certainly since the Scriptures are acknowledged to be a perfect Rule of Faith and Manners, those ought in the first place to be consulted, both as to what we are to believe, and how we are to live. Let us accordingly *first*, read the Scriptures, and observe what we are there commanded to do or to avoid; and *then* by those Commands, let us order our Conversations, whether they cross or agree with our corrupt Inclinations. Let us read the Scriptures, and take notice of the Articles and Propositions there deliver'd, and then let us form our Notions and Principles, whether they suit with our

private and prejudicate Opinions, or no. Let us study with a sincere desire to be inform'd, lay aside partiality in searching after Truth, and search only for this end, even to know our Duty. And then we may rest assur'd, that the Reading of the Scriptures will prove beneficial. For by such an impartial Search, we shall *find* out Truth; and when we have found it, we shall be ready with the utmost joy to *receive* it.

Fourthly, In order to the more profitable Reading of the Scriptures, our chief Business is or shou'd be, to observe and insist upon those points, which are *absolutely necessary* to Salvation.

This Rule obliges universally, as to all Persons: For both Ignorant and Learned are concern'd herein. The Ignorant ought to make this, not only their chief but *sole* Design; because the sublimer and more obscure parts are above their Capacity, and therefore dangerous to be examin'd by such, as being liable to be mistaken. And yet even the Learned, who have Capacity and Means to apprehend some things, and comprehend others, which vulgar and common Christians cannot attain unto, ought to make those
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other plain and necessary Truths, if not their *sole*, yet their *chief* Design. Because their Duty and eternal Happiness are the most nearly concern'd in the Practice and Knowledge of them; whereas Salvation is no way hazarded by the Ignorance of the rest.

As all Persons are oblig'd to observe the necessary Points of Salvation; so these necessary points are easy to be understood and found by all Persons: tho there are some obscurities, which Learned Men cannot know, till time brings them into a better light, and which weak Men wrest to their own destruction; yet God hath shew'd thee, O Man, what he indispensably requires of thee, in such words, as a diligent and honest heart can quickly apprehend. And we may rest assur'd, that what we cannot find by a constant and impartial Inquiry, we may be very safely ignorant of.

Let the Men of Wit and Design read the Scriptures on purpose to *wrangle* in Controversies, and raise Disputes; but whilst others dispute, let us read the Scriptures to learn to *live*. Let some employ their Heads with vain Curiosities and foolish Questions, no way tending to advance a

truly good and Christian Life; but let us overlook such idle Enquiries, and carefully observe the things that be needful. The less necessary truths are the most obscure; and this shou'd prevent too nice a search: the most necessary truths are the least obscure, and this shou'd invite a perfect Observation. In the manner of Revelation and the Discovery of his Will, God lays a strict obligation upon us to take notice of those things, wherein the Duty and Happiness of Mankind are closely involv'd; and we are highly inexcusable, if we do not. Let us see what God enjoyns us to believe, let us see what he commands us to do or to avoid; let this Knowledge, which is practical, be the end of reading the Old and New *Testament*. And then our Minds will be furnish'd with most noble and excellent truths, and we advanc'd to a divine and spiritual Life. Then the Scripture will be effectually *profitable to us for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness*; and we become perfect Men of God, *thoroughly furnish'd unto all good Works*.

By this Direction which I have just now offer'd, I wou'd not be thought even so much as to insinuate, that I look upon
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the searching of the obscure parts of Scripture to be sinful in it self: But this I may and will venture to assert,

Fifthly and Lastly, As a cautionary Rule and Direction, That to *prefer* the obscure places before the plain and necessary, or to *neglect* the plain and necessary for the sake of the obscure, is in both cases sinful, and ought to be avoided.

However, When the necessary points of Salvation are fully examin'd and chiefly observ'd, such, as have *Capacity, Means* and *Time* to look into those darker passages of Holy Writ, may innocently do it. Only to such of us I crave leave to offer two Rules to our Observation.

First, That we wou'd stop our Curiosity, where Revelation has drawn a vail: Because *the secret things belong unto the Lord, but things that are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever.* And therefore 'tis an indecent and daring presumption to extend our prying tempers so far as to determine about any matters, which God in his Wisdom has not thought fit to discover.

Secondly, That we wou'd always interpret the obscure places by the plain. Be-
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cause it cannot be suppos'd that God will by any certain *Mysterious* passage contradict the *exprefs* Declarations of his Will.

Both these Rules are very necessary in Inquiries of this Nature; and I shall add no more but my constant Prayers to God to open our Eyes, that we may see the wondrous things of his Law; and my hearty desire, that every one before he reads any portion of Scripture, wou'd use this or the like Form of Prayer for himself.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for my learning; grant that I may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, I may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed Hope of Everlasting Life; which thou hast given me in our Saviour JESUS CHRIST. Amen.

ESSAY

ESSAY II.

OF MEDITATION.

S E C T. I.

The Nature, Excellency, and Necessity of Meditation in general.

MEDITATION is a deep and serious *Act* of the Mind of Man, by which he is enabled to examine Arguments and compare Matters, and to reason backward and forward upon a subject. It imployes our *Thoughts* about things past, present, and to come; about things possible, probable and certain. And this Power every Man finds within himself, in a greater or lesser degree.

This is the General Nature of Meditation.

tion. And the bare *Possession* of such a Power in Man, is a very great Excellency: Because, as he enjoys it, 'tis a Perfection peculiar to himself, and of which the Brutes are not capable.

'Tis true, there are some very unaccountable Actions of brute Creatures: Actions, which give us some reason to believe, that they do not proceed from pure Mechanism of Body, but from some higher Principle than that of Matter. I am by no means inclinable to entertain the Opinion of a certain * Philosopher, and say of Beasts, as an Excellent † Interpreter explains his Principle, that they have Eyes and see not, Ears and hear not, Noses and smell not, that they eat without hunger, drink without thirst, and howl without pain.

But tho' Sense be granted them upon the account of some higher Principle than that of Matter, yet the Power of Meditation is justly and reasonably deny'd. That Sense which is granted them, extends only to things present, and arises from what strikes the bodily Organs at that time. But Self-consciousness, Reflection, and Intuition they have not: they cannot reflect upon

* Des Cartes. † Dr. Beniley.

what is past, they cannot look forward to what is to come.

Whereas in Man these *Perfections* are actually inherent in a wonderfull degree. His thoughts are here, and in the *Indies* in a moment. He surveys the accounts of past Ages, and can foresee probable future Events. The former Passages of his Life he can review, and take a prospect for the ordering his Conversation for the time to come. With his own Reflections he can be delighted, and his Mind pleas'd with noble Contemplations. And it must on all hands be acknowledg'd, he has in these things an Excellency in it self, and an Excellency above the Brutal World.

AS MEDITATION is an *Excellent* Perfection in it self; so 'tis a Perfection that is *Necessary*. And by Necessity in this place I only mean, that we cannot live happily in this World without it.

From constant Experience we find our selves plac'd in a World, where we are entertain'd with variety of Objects, striking upon our Senses, and courting our Affections. Within us we feel a Natural desire and thirst after Happiness.
With-

Without us, many things do strongly promise to fulfil this Propensity of Nature, and satisfy our Desires.

Now had we not a Power to meditate and reflect, to consider and compare things, every minute we shou'd be in danger of being miserably deceiv'd, wretchedly mistaken. God knew the present State and Condition of Mankind, and for this reason doubtless amongst the rest gave him this inestimable Privilege. By which Privilege he is enabled to distinguish between absolute Necessities, and Necessities of his own making; between *Imaginary* Objects of Happiness, and Objects which are true and *real*; how much we may expect from the World, and in what it will fail us.

On this account we may readily perceive what a close Connexion there is between *Meditation* and *Happiness*, even as to this Life. For suppose we were to be born perfect Men, suppose we had Reason in the highest degree upon our first coming into the World; yet in this case, it wou'd be necessary for us to pause a while; and commune with our own Minds, before we resolv'd what to embrace,

brace, and which course to take. For, since many Objects may promise fair, and carry Felicity in the front, we ought to weigh and determine by leisure and degrees, lest in our choice our Reason shou'd be blinded with Passion and brib'd with Affection. And so we, thro' a mistaken Judgment, become really miserable with abortive Hopes, and an imaginary Bliss.

But when we moreover consider, what weak and helpless Creatures we were born; how long we converse only with sensible Objects, and the many Prejudices, Prepossessions, and false Notions we receive in our Infancy, there is still greater Reason for us to meditate. Because in a great measure we are forc'd, as we desire to be happy, to unravel and dislodge most of the Principles of our Education. When we come to be Men, we shall certainly find reason to correct and alter our Notions; and sometimes wholly to efface the very Apprehensions of the Natures of things, which we receiv'd when we were Infants. And what a Blessing is it, and how much do we owe to the Infinite Goodness of God, that we have an inherent Power within us, whereby we may order and correct
such

such Errors, as encourag'd and continu'd wou'd entitle us to Disappointments. So strong a Connexion is there between *Meditation* and *Happiness*, that we cannot have the one without the Exercise of the other. And hence arises the Necessity of the same.

S E C T. II.

The Nature and Excellency of a Christian's Meditation.

THE peculiar Meditation of a *Christian* is when the Thoughts and Mind are taken up in the Contemplation of *Divine* and *Spiritual* Truths. The Nature and Attributes of God, the Works of Creation and Providence, the mysterious contrivance of the *Gospel*, the Dictates of right Reason, the Precepts of Divine Revelation; and in a word, whatever concerns the Duty and Happiness of a *Christian*, are the Subjects and Matter on which he spends his Thoughts. Upon his retirement in his chamber, he chuses to consider one or more of these at a time, as he has capacity and occasion. There in the silence of his Senses
and

and Passions, he calmly argues with himself upon these matters.

This kind of Meditations in point of Excellency, is much superiour to the other: because *they* are employ'd about the best and most important Objects. And as in the former we excell'd the Brute Creatures; so in these we excel those of our own Nature, who have this Faculty in themselves, but do not use it in so good a manner.

If the Mind be the chief Distinction between a Brute and a Man, then the Capacity and Improvement of the Mind may be in such different measures, that one may vastly excel another. And nothing does so much enlarge and exalt the Mind, as the noble Contemplations of Divine Truths. Such Thoughts as these make *the Righteous more Excellent than his Neighbour*; tho' Illustrious for Blood, Station and Riches.

'Tis methinks unbecoming the Dignity of a Humane Understanding, to be wholly imploy'd in the trifling and little Affairs of the Neighbourhood, and find no other Entertainment for our Brains, but what we see and what we
hear

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hear of others. That Person deserves not to be valued, whose Thoughts are obscurely stuff'd with vain, haughty and unprofitable Conceits. And if ever the Comparison be made, he must give way, and yield the Preference to a Regular Mind, and the clear Perception of necessary Truth.

So that a *Christian's* Meditation is better than any other Meditations: because *other* Meditations are about the Honours, or Wealth, or Pleasures of this Life; but *this* takes in every thing that is useful, important and divine. A wicked Man or a Fool must never pretend to stand in competition with a Wise and Good *Christian*, whose Thoughts are fix'd upon his Duty here, and his Everlasting Felicity hereafter.

S E C T. III.

The Usefulness of Meditation to a Divine and Spiritual Life.

ONe of the first Benefits of *Meditation* is this, That by *Meditation* all *Truths* appear more *clear* to the Mind.

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There are such Difficulties attending a Search after Truth, there are so many Errors founded upon some Material and Important Truths, that it requires the utmost care and diligence to find out Truth, and distinguish it from Falshood. Unbias'd by private Interest, Inclination and Opinion, we must seek for it as for *hidden Treasure*, with the pleasant toil of laborious Studies.

Yet after all, no means prove so effectual to a clear Discovery, as deep Reflections and retir'd Meditations. An Ingenious * Author calls Attention, The Natural Prayer * Malebranche. of the Soul to God for farther Illumination. And indeed when a Man calmly retires within himself, as his Thoughts by *Attention* are reduc'd to a greater *Unity*; so by this united force of Thought he sees more clearly into the Nature and Reason, the Causes and Consequences of that which is the present subject of his Meditation.

But this Method has a *peculiar* efficacy to improve the Mind in the perception of *Divine* and *Moral* Truths. By such a serious View we arrive at the meaning of the Principles of Religion,
D are

are able to draw Practical Conclusions from them, and become firmly settled in our *Belief*. I dare be bold to say, that tho' it be a work of some Difficulty and Art, to acquire a right and deep Method of Thinking; yet when a presence of Mind is once obtain'd, a *Christian* may make wonderful Advances in Religious matters, and have a Mind gradually open'd and inlighten'd to a View of things. When God and our Duty are made the objects of our Reflections, the more we reflect, the sooner we discover what we wanted, and perceive even more than we search'd for, with equal pleasure and admiration. This the wise Son of *Syrach* intimates by his comparing the increase of Wisdom to a Brook, *Ecclus.* 24. 30. and adding this Remark from the Comparison, *Vers.* 31. — *And lo my Brook became a River, and my River became a Sea.*

Those Divine *Systems* which have been extant in the World, and that *Christian Knowledge* which has been attain'd unto, have been by *digesting* the Arguments for points of Faith and matters of Practice, and by *contracting* them into as narrow a compass as is possible, and then by *spending* our Thoughts upon them.

And

Of Meditation. §1

And if any future Advances be made this way, I am fully satisfy'd the lower and higher degrees must be done by Thinking. I do not mean, that Thinking does evacuate the necessity of Reading either Men or Books. Doubtless the Opinions we read in Authors, the infallible Truths we find in the Sacred Scriptures, and the Observations we gather from Conversation, are necessary to prepare matter for the Mind to work upon. But after all, Meditation must render them absolutely our own. Reading, as a * Learned Man very well observes, * Mr. Norris. may make our Heads full, but Meditation makes them clear.

And if Meditation has so direct a tendency to improve our Souls in Christian Knowledge, 'tis a very edifying Rule; 'tis a Rule by which our *Profiting may appear unto all*. Not only because we are commanded to increase in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour *Jesus Christ*, and so 'tis at once both a Duty and a Perfection: but because it enables us to carry on, not only the Salvation of others, but our own.

To our own Salvation, it must needs be instrumental: Because we must first

know our Duty, before we can practise it. For, suppose we shou'd perform some Actions excellent in themselves blindly and by accident, I may say, 'tis a happiness that we did act so, but I cannot say there is much Vertue in them. But when we labour to know what we ought to practise, and endeavor to practise what we clearly know; there is something of Excellency in such a Choice, there is something that deserves the Name of Goodness. And tho' the best Casuists are not always the best Livers; yet this abuse of Knowledge, is no just plea for Ignorance. 'Tis the Apostle's particular Direction to *Timothy*, his Son in the Faith, 1 *Tim.* 4. 15. that he *meditate upon* those Vertues and Rules, he had before prescrib'd, that he *give himself wholly to them*. And why does he exhort him to this Recollection of Spirit, this intenseness of Thought? He immediately adds the reason, That *thy profiting may appear unto all*. By which it appears to be the plain judgment of St. *Paul*, that *Meditation* is certainly a necessary Instrument to Vertue.

Secondly, Meditation is exceedingly useful to carry on a divine and spiritual Life; because it makes every thing that
we

we do know have an *influence* upon us.

General Notions of Religious Duties do not animate Religion in us; an habitual Knowledge of Christianity in the highest Perfection, will not of it self make us like *Christians*, to bring forth much fruit, and so become *Christ's* true Disciples. A Person in Disputation may offer the most convincing Arguments for the Articles of Faith, and may produce very persuasive Reasons and Means for matters of Practice: and yet how convincing, how persuasive soever those Arguments, Reasons and Means may be to others, they will have little effect upon himself; except he frequently retire deeply to meditate upon every particular Point. Tho' he may be able to give an *Answer* to them that shall ask a reason of the hope that is in him; and tho' he can prove the Gospel to be the Power of God unto Salvation, unto all them that believe: Yet if the Devil divert his Thoughts from laying them seriously to his own Heart, and reflecting calmly upon them when he is by himself, his Faith, his Reason will become ineffectual to all the purposes of a good Life, dead, unfruitful, without Works.

Whereas 'tis a *serious* Application of every Truth to our selves by close and constant Meditations, that must work our Souls into a Divine Temper. 'Tis this that gives Life and Vigor to the Natural Notions of Good and Evil, Conscience and Reason. 'Tis this that affects our Hearts and moves us to a suitable Practice. 'Tis this that establishes our Faith, and confirms our Hope, and weakens our Corruptions, and strengthens our Graces, and raises our Devotions, and brings us to holy Resolutions.

By such Reflections the Principles of Truth, and Grounds of Certainty will have their desir'd Influence. The more we think, the better we shall be satisfy'd. Religion can bear the utmost Test of the clearest Reason; and according to the settled Assertion of the Apostle, 2 Cor. 4. 3. *If the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.*

And as we shall be better satisfy'd, the more we think; so the more we think, we shall be the more strongly induc'd to practise. Because this frequent Thought will represent to our Minds in lively Images, the Obligations and Motives to
Duty,

Duty, both Natural and Christian; the excellency of Vertue, and the deformity of Vice, with all their tendencies and effects, both in this World and a future State. And our Judgments being convinc'd by such Considerations, and our Affections being mov'd and excited by the Conviction of our Judgments, we want no humane means to provoke us unto good Works. In such a case nothing is wanting but our Prayers to God for the Assistance of his Grace.

Thirdly, Meditation is exceedingly useful to carry on a Divine and Religious Life; because the want of this is one of the true *Causes* of Immorality and Prophaneness.

The Age we now live in, is an Age of extreme Light and Knowledge. I wish I cou'd say, the *Regularity* of our Wills was as remarkable as the *Improvement* of our Understandings. But sad Experience gives us too full a Conviction of the growth of Impiety and Vice. And there is no one Cause, to which we may so properly ascribe it, as the want of Thinking.

Wou'd Men give themselves time to think, and examine the grounds of Certainty;

tainty; wou'd they but admit such Evidence in matters of Religion, as they are willing to do in any other Case, they wou'd be firmly satisfy'd in the Faith of a *Christian*. For *Short Thinking* and *Partial Arguing* lie at the foundation of Infidelity and Scepticism. Hence Inconsistencies are maintain'd, Absurdities encourag'd, weak Arguments receiv'd, and Demonstrations blindly rejected. None are Atheists in Opinion, but those who are either first so in Practice, or have only read a few idle Romances and lascivious Plays and Poetry. Whereas the greatest, and gravest and wisest part of Mankind, who have made it their business to consider well the Principles of Religion, have firmly settled a mature Belief. Think calmly, reason coolly, be willing to be convinc'd upon the highest Evidence; and then, O Man, be an Infidel if thou can'st.

As want of Meditation is the cause of denying the Truth; so it is also for want of Meditation that Men *hold the Truth in Unrighteousness*. All, who profess themselves of the *Christian Church*, and do receive and maintain the same Faith, do not *live as becometh the Gospel of Christ*. And against such God may complain, as he once did against the *Jews* by his Prophet,

phet, *Isa.* 1. 3. — *My people will not consider.* They profess they know God, and believe the *Gospel*, but in Works they seem to deny both. And what Account can be given of the mad Frolicks, wild Pranks, vicious Practices of some Persons, who are in *other* cases wise enough, and in *this* wou'd think it the greatest Reproach to be thought Infidels? We can say nothing, but that they will not actually attend to what they habitually know. We cannot accuse them of Ignorance, but Neglect. 'Tis Inconsideration, and want of Application. 'Tis Inadvertency, 'tis Rashness. There is so little temptation of Profit or Pleasure in a wicked Course of living, to weigh against the Temporal, Spiritual, Eternal Inconveniencies that are incurr'd, that nothing but a sottish Stupidity can induce Men to a Compliance. They have seen the Unfruitfulness of Sin in others, they have experienc'd it themselves; and yet, Fools as they are, they return to the same Vice upon the first Temptation.

When we reflect upon this whole Matter, 'tis easy from thence to guess at the Cause. It seems very apparent, that they do not allow themselves time to think of the Nature and Consequences of things,
that

that they look no farther than to day; that they do not take their Measures from seeing afar off. And Oh that Men were wise, *that they understood this, that they wou'd consider their latter end!*

Fourthly and Lastly, Meditation is exceedingly useful to carry on a divine and religious Life; because Death and Judgment, Heaven and Hell can be *no* other way represented to us.

Tho' the Certainty of Death be prov'd by the testimony of Sense, and therefore no *Sceptic* can deny it; tho' the Departure of a *Friend*, or the Sight of a Funeral, may make some sudden Impression upon us; yet a lasting, deep, and useful Impression can only be made by silent Meditations upon our latter End. For the time of our Death is at a greater or lesser distance from this very Minute. Now that which is future, by frequent Reflections can only be represented, as if it were actually present. And 'tis living under an habitual Expectation of a Dissolution that is approaching to us, that will effectually put us upon a wise and holy Preparation for it.

As for Instance: When in a serene and
quiet

quiet temper of Mind and Body, I particularly and frequently consider, That I am a mortal Creature, and born to die; that there will come a day when I must breath my last; when it will be said in the Neighbourhood, *Such a one is dead*; and that I know not how soon it may be, when my Soul must be separated from my Body, and I cease to live in this World: when, I say, I particularly and frequently consider these important Truths, then, and not till then, will the sense of approaching Mortality engage me to lay up a stock of Vertues, to stand me in great stead at that gloomy Night, that I may lay hold on Everlasting Life. Not only a stock of Vertues in General, but of such peculiar Vertues as will be immediately requisite in a state of *Sickness*.

• After Death cometh Judgment, and after Judgment the two Eternities, of Happiness and Misery. And as these are the Christian Motives to Obedience, and strong enough to move us: so they must be confess'd to be at present *unseen*, and at a *distance*. Now how shall these Invisible Things become as it were Visible? How shall these Future Things become as it were Present? How? but by warm Reflections upon what God has appointed,
pro-

promis'd, and threatned in his Revealed Will. How can we look upon the *things that are not seen*, but by retir'd Meditations of the Soul? How can we behold the Joys and Terrors of a future State, and the Manner of God's Judging the World by his Son, but by a steadfast Faith, and often thinking on what God has been pleas'd to discover as to these Articles of Faith?

O Christian, if ever you desire these Truths, of the highest importance, to have any Influence upon the ordering your Heart and Life, according to God's Commandments, I earnestly intreat you to take all imaginable Opportunities to entertain your Mind with their Truth and Meaning. You are now encompass'd with Objects of Sense, and 'tis Thought alone that can carry you to Objects beyond this transitory and vexatious State: Sit down then and consider, that thou art created an accountable Creature. Think deeply, that God will one day summon you before his Tribunal to give an Account unto him how you have liv'd in this World. Then pause a while, and take a farther Prospect; a Prospect of that Everlasting State of Bliss and Glory, which God hath prepared for the Righteous

teous, a Prospect of those Exquisite and Eternal Torments which God hath threatned to inflict upon the Wicked.

And when you have well digested these Truths, and made them familiar to your Soul, surely you will live, as one who is to be judg'd, as one who is to be of an Eternal Duration. Seeing there will come a Day when you must leave all your Possessions upon Earth, *Seeing all these things must be dissolv'd*; seeing you and I, and the whole World *must appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ*; seeing there is a Heaven to reward, and a Hell to punish; and one of these States must unavoidably be our Portion, and that Unchangeable for ever; *What manner of Persons ought we to be in all Holy Conversation?* How shou'd these Reflections engage us to take heed unto our Ways, and *perfect Holiness in the Fear of God?*

ESSAY

knows a Prophet of those Prophecies and
 eternal Torments which God hath
 threatened to inflict upon the Wicked.

Which he ought to read with all diligence
 I think that and therefore I am to you
 Some body you will say, as one who is
 to be taught, as one who is to be of an
 eternal Duration, being they will come
 a Day when you shall have all your
 portion upon Earth, every all your
 part of your portion, being you and it and
 the whole World and again before the
 Judgment Seat of Christ, being there is
 a portion to reward, and a Hell to pun-
 ish, and one of the blessed will be
 rewarded in the portion, and the other
 punished for ever. But many of
 the people say it is in all Holy Scriptures
 How then should these Reflections
 be made in the heart upon our Wicked
 and the Holy Scriptures in the heart of God?

ESSAY

ESSAY III.

OF

Self-Examination.

SECT. I.

The Meaning and Extent of SELF-EXAMINATION.

RETIREMENT, for its own sake, and out of a peevish humour to Society, ought not to be the choice of any Wise or Good Person. We are born to be sociable Creatures, and are duly qualify'd to answer this end. And therefore a retired Life can never be commendable, except it be employ'd to make us more useful when we appear again in public; except it be spent in intense Thoughts, and private Devotions.

As Meditation in general is a high Perfection

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fection of Human Nature, and when particularly apply'd to the truths of *Christianity* and Rules of Practice, proves very useful to carry on a Religious Conversation: so 'tis eminently of such use, when we take our own ways into solemn Consideration, and observe the Springs and Motions of a Divine and Animal Life within our selves. This kind of Meditation does usually and properly go under the name of *Self-examination*. The Meaning and Extent of which necessary Duty, is the Subject I am now about to consider.

Know thy self, was a renowned Saying of a wise *Grecian*, and an excellent Rule which improv'd Natural Light prescrib'd unto the World. Much of the same kind is that passage of the Psalmist, *Psal. 4. 4. Commune with your own heart in your chamber, and be still*: not as if the Royal Prophet's Advice was to retire into our Chambers, and be so still as to sleep away our time, or to think of nothing, or at least to think of nothing material and important: but 'tis to be *still* there in such a manner, as to afford Time and Capacity to commune and meditate with our selves about our selves. This sort of *Examination* consists of these two Parts, *viz.* A deep and serious Search into the inward

Of Self-examination. 65

ward Springs and Motions of our Souls; and, a full and perfect Examination of our Lives, by calling our own ways to Remembrance.

The first part of *Self-examination* consists in a deep and serious Search into the inward Springs and Motions of our Souls.

A Self-examiner must first look into that part of him, which is most properly call'd *Himself*; I mean, his Mind. And in his Meditation upon that, as a *Christian*, he is to observe and examine, how *the Flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the Flesh*; what Advances they severally make within him, and by what Means and Occasions they do so. The first Scenes and Draughts of a good or bad Life are there laid. And as either of these Principles prevail, he is more or less Wicked, he is Vertuous in a higher or lower degree.

To make this Duty the more easy, plain and practicable, let these Particulars be the Subjects of our Examination. Let us examine,

First, What *kind* of Thoughts arises and do's chiefly reign in our Minds; whether

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ther they be Good or Bad, Indifferent or Vain.

Are we subject to proud, envious, revengeful prophane and wanton Thoughts? Do our Hearts run after Covetousness? Or are our Minds set upon Righteousness, and do we delight to contemplate those things which are requir'd of us to do? Something or other we must think of. And therefore the Question, which we ought to put to our selves is, what we think of most: and the next Inquiry is, what moral Turpitude or Goodness there is in them.

After these we inquire again, whether our Heads be not stuff'd with Objects indifferent and vain? Are we wholly taken up with what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewithall we shall be cloathed? Do our Thoughts run upon our Hawks and our Hounds, our Horses and our Sports, our Bottle and our Mistress, dull Conceptions, airy Notions, Toys, News, Fancies and Fashions? Or are we building Castles in the Air, framing Notions of things that never were, nor never will be; pleasing our Thoughts with Fictions and Chimæra's, and a fond Bliss, which has no other Existence but in a confus'd Imagination?

Com-

Commune, O *Christian*, with your own Heart about these matters. Turn your Thoughts vigorously inward. Read the hidden and mysterious part of your self. Discover hereby the Nature of your Thoughts. There will be this immediate and particular use of such an Examination, that by such a Discovery you will easily *discern* the prevailing Affections within you. For you will naturally think the most of what you chiefly delight in. After this Observation made of the Nature of our Thoughts, let us narrowly examine,

Secondly, At what times, by what Means, upon what Occasions, good or bad, or vain Thoughts have the greatest Dominion within us. And then let us determine, what proper Methods must be us'd to excite, strengthen and increase good Thoughts; to resist, suppress and abhor wicked Imaginations, and to regulate and direct those inward Motions toward indifferent and trifling Objects, that they may not by this *Misplacing* and *Excess* degenerate into Vicious Acts of the Mind.

The Second Part of Self-examination

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consists in a full and perfect Examination of our *Lives*, by calling our own Ways to Remembrance. And this Examination may be employ'd, either on our good or bad Actions in general, or on our good Actions in particular, or purely on the Sins and Miscarriages of our Lives.

First, The Examination of our Lives ought to be employ'd on our good and bad Actions in *general*.

'Tis brutish neither to look back upon what is past, nor forward to what is to come; and 'tis very unhappy to be ignorant of our own state. Therefore we ought frequently to retire into our Chamber, and, when we are there alone, begin to converse with our selves. The former passages of our Lives must be consider'd, and our Minds reflect upon what we have been doing, since we had the use and exercise of Reason, and were capable of knowing good and evil, and how we have discharg'd the several Duties which were incumbent on us. A general Survey and Examination of the most material parts of our Behaviour must be made, and the utmost sincerity us'd in this Search, that so we may arrive at a true

View

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View of our selves, and a right Judgment of our Spiritual Condition.

To this end, let us consider the different *Periods* of our Lives, and the several *Relations* we stood in, with respect to God, our Neighbour and our selves: And then have a general Scheme of Sin and duty, of Vertue and Vice before us. This Scheme may be form'd by being conversant in the holy Scriptures. For there we find the Law of our God prescribing to our Practice, and teaching what we ought to do, and what we ought to avoid. When we have form'd this Scheme, 'tis only comparing our own Actions with this Rule, to know what good we have done, what evil we have committed, how far we have kept the Commandments of our God, and in what particulars we have offended.

To illustrate this matter, I will produce two or three Instances, whereby we may perceive how to proceed in all other parts of our Duty.

'Tis our plain and indispensable Duty to worship God in public and private, according to his holy Ordinances, and to *worship him in Spirit and in Truth.*

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Now to know whether we have broken or kept this Law of our God, 'tis only asking our selves these few Questions. Am I frequent and constant in my Devotions to my Creator? or am I seldom on my knees before Him? Do I seek a retired place to pray unto Him? Am I delighted to visit his Temple, and praise Him among much People? Or, am I glad of any Excuse to neglect both; and do I wilfully absent from Church-worship and Family-prayers, when I have an Opportunity and an Obligation to come?

Or, suppose we do attend and come, then these Questions ought farther to be put. Do I come purely to confess my Sins and obtain pardon, to declare my Wants and beg Supplies? Or is my appearance only a customary Form and an Hypocritical Service? Are my Thoughts intent upon what I am a doing? Or am I troubled with Distractions of Spirit, and chuse to think of any thing forreign to the business in hand to shuffle off the Time? To pause a while between these Questions, and ask our own Consciences, Am I guilty of this, or, Have I perform'd that, will quickly discover our Sin and our Duty.

Again,

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Again, 'Tis our plain and indispensable Duty to be just and charitable to our Neighbours. Now to know whether I have omitted or perform'd these Duties, or acted contrary to them, I need only to commune with my own Heart, after this or the like manner.

As to *Justice*. Am I sincere in my Words, and faithful in my declared Designs? Or do I speak what I do not think, and promise what I never intend to perform? Am I ready to over-reach and go beyond my Brother, and comply with any means to promote my worldly Interest? Or do I hate and abhor treacherous and knavish Tricks, and all unlawful ways of Gain?

As to *Charity*. Have I a tender regard for the welfare of my Fellow-creatures? Or can I plot Mischief against them, and unpitying see the Agonies of their condition? Do I shun my Friends in Distress, and add Unkindness to their other Misfortunes? Or do I visit them in their Afflictions, inquire into their Circumstances, and relieve them according to my Power? Such inquiries will give me a Knowledge, whether I have answer'd my Obligations or not.

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I will now instance in some Particulars with respect to our selves. 'Tis our plain and indispensable Duty to be humble, and temperate, and chaste. And let us by these Rules commune with our own Hearts about observing or neglecting them.

As to *Humility*. Am I courteous and affable to the meanest Mortal? Or do I treat him with intolerable insolence and a haughty disdain? Have I a lowly opinion of my self? Or do I despise others unjustly, and think more highly of my self, than I ought to think? Am I content and satisfy'd with the Dispensations of Providence? Or do I affect things above my Station and Estate?

As to *Temperance*. Do I drink more than my Health and Constitution will bear, than is consistent with the true use and exercise of my Reason? Or do I take heed unto my self, least at any time my Heart be overcharg'd with Surfeiting and Drunkenness! Do I deny the Temptations of vain Company, when they wou'd entice me to be drunk? Or do I run to the same excess of Riot with other Men, to avoid the Censure of Preciseness and Singularity?

As

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As to *Chastity*. Am I perfectly pure both in Body and Soul, from wilful and voluntary Pollutions, in Word, Thought, and Action? Or, do I live in any actual Uncleaness? Do I delight in Jestings which is not convenient? And do I indulge and encourage Wanton, Lascivious, and Impure Thoughts?

Thus I have gone through that Part of our Self-examination, which concerns our good and bad Actions in general. But this Examination may and ought to be employ'd.

Secondly, On our Good Actions in Particular. 'Tis not enough for us to know in the Main, that we are good in some respects; but even our Vertues will bear a strict Scrutiny, and ought to be the subjects of our Examination. And here we are to consider, with what *Intentions* they were perform'd, with what *Imperfections* they were attended, and by what *Assistances* we were enabled to do them.

'Tis the *Intention* which God eminently respects, and *Christ* commands his Disciples to secure. 'Tis the *Intention* which denominates an Action, materially Good, either

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either Vertuous or Vicious. And accordingly when we have been upon Self-examination, and found some good Deed that we've done, we are then to enquire into the *Cause* and *End* of that Action. For the Determination of this Point will reach us what Value to set upon it. If we aim'd at the Glory of God, and comply'd purely because it was our Duty, we may have that just Applause given, *Well done, thou good and faithful Servant*. But if we proceed only upon Temporal Reasons and Worldly Principles, whatever we do is impossible to be Vertue. Because cou'd we secure these Ends by being bad, 'tis plain we wou'd never take the pains of becoming good.

Next to the *Intentions*, we are to examine with what *Imperfections* our Vertues are attended. For let us be never so sincere and religious in our Intentions, our best Deeds will be accompany'd with so many frailties, such visible infirmities, that we may truly say, Wo be to the most innocent Life, if God shou'd search into it without mixtures of Mercy. No one can be good, who forbears to make Reflections upon these Particulars: because the Sins of our holy things constitute one great part of our Repentance. And therefore

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fore without a due Examination of them, our Repentance must be imperfect. Nay, there will be these farther Uses of this clear and familiar Examination, that it will serve as an Instrument to teach us *Humility*; and to keep us from being proud of our imperfect Goodness; and to let us know the Necessity of relying on the Merits and Righteousness of *Christ*, for Acceptance and Salvation.

As we are to examine the Intentions and Imperfections in our Vertues; so it will be farther necessary to examine, by what *Assistances* we were enabled to do them. And here we must be forc'd to acknowledge our Inclinations to that which is evil, our Aversion to that which is good, and our absolute Dependance upon God for an inward and supernatural Principle of a Divine and Spiritual Life. Arguments drawn from Reason are too weak to govern corrupted Nature; and *it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do according to his good Pleasure.*

Such will be the Reflections of a good *Christian* upon his best Performances. By these Reflections he will be taught, to impute to himself all the Evil he hath
com-

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committed, and to ascribe unto God all the Good that he hath done; to give Him the Glory, and firmly trust in his future Aid.

Let it not then suffice to have an imperfect View of our Moral State; but let us ever search into the true Cause for which we did an Action in it self Excellent and Vertuous; let us seriously review after what manner it was perform'd, and let us duly consider by what power we were enabled to act according to our Obligations. By such a communing with our own Hearts about our good Actions in particular, we shall quickly learn the Value or Demerits of our best Perfections. But,

Thirdly, The last Part of Self-examination, as to outward Actions, may and ought to be employ'd by us, purely on the *Sins* and *Miscarriages* of our Lives,

There is no Man that sinneth not. The very best Persons upon inquiry find Crimes sufficient to make them *go mourning all the day long*. But still it must be acknowledg'd, that all are not equally Sinners, nor the same outward Acts of Sin equally criminal in all Persons. For two
Persons

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Persons may commit the same outward Crime, and yet not be partakers of the same *Guilt*, nor liable to the same *Punishment*. And all this Difference arises from particular *Circumstances*; which do certainly vary Actions, and make them more or less Heinous.

Now this Reflection is an Engagement to inquire into the several *Aggravations* of our Crimes, that we may truly know *what*, and *how* great, Sinners we are. And in this Case I offer these following Rules and Directions.

Tho'tis a certain Principle, that Sin is the worst of Evils: yet some are more heinous even in their very *Natures*, and others are more injurious in their *Consequences*, to the ruining and debauching of the World. And both these are to be well consider'd in the Examination of our Crimes.

Again, If we go on to do an Action, which we *know* beforehand to be a Sin, if we feel the Checks of our own *Conscience*, and the Motions of God's *Holy Spirit* against it, and still with a wicked Resolution bear down both on purpose to commit it; these are heightning *Circumstances*

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cumstances of our Guilt. Such considerable Aggravations must justly render us the more inexcusable.

Nay farther, 'tis a great Aggravation to sin after the Advice and Reproofs of Friends, after Vows and Resolutions solemnly made and renew'd at several times, either in the Sacrament, Sickness or Distress. Because this is to reject the best Testimony of Friendship, and to add the Breach of new and additional Bonds to our former Disobedience. 'Tis a great Aggravation to sin after extraordinary Mercies receiv'd at the hands of God; because this shows the height of Ingratitude. 'Tis a great Aggravation to fall after the Experience of Divine Judgments; because this is an evident Token of an obstinate and incorrigible Temper. 'Tis a great Aggravation to fall into the same Sins after Judgments; because to fall into a course, after we have felt and tasted the Evil thereof, and for which we have before been severely punish'd, must be against the fullest Conviction and clearest Knowledge.

By applying such kind of Rules to the various Crimes of which we stand guilty, we shall arrive to that, which was part of *Job's* Prayer, *Job* 13. 23. Even to
know

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know our *Transgression* and our *Sin*. And thus I have laid down the Meaning and Extent of *Self-examination* in its full Latitude.

S E C T. II.

General Rules and Directions for a Practical Self-examination.

THE *First* General Rule and Direction that I shall offer, is, That all imaginable *Opportunities* be taken and improv'd of *Conversing* with our selves.

By *Opportunities* in this place, I mean, not only those of *Time* and *Retirement*, but of *Temper* also. For our Bodies and Minds are not always in a fit Frame and equal Disposition for this Performance. As we are to prepare our selves by Prayer to God, and other Exercises of Religion, for such a Discerning Spirit; so, when we find our Passions calm, our Conscience tender, susceptible of Divine impressions, and our Bodies ready to serve our Souls, 'tis our Duty to lay hold on these Advantages, to improve such Occasions, that we may arrive to the Knowledge of our selves.

Secondly, Great care must be us'd to be
Sincere

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Sincere and Impartial in the Duty of *Self-examination*. For by these means we may arrive to a true View of our selves, and make to our endless and unspeakable Comfort a right Judgment of our Spiritual Condition.

The Reason of this propos'd useful Rule is plainly this. Because God will not always judge us, as we judge our selves. If we thro' the excess of Scruples, Fears and Superstition, pass a too rigid Sentence on our own Souls, God will not condemn us, because we too severely, despairingly condemn our selves. Or, if thro' *Presumption* we put a too favorable Construction, God will not acquit us, because we so easily acquit our selves.

I am apt to believe *Presumption* to be a more prevailing Sin than *Despair*. For this Reason, I offer Sincerity and Impartiality in *Self-examination*; principally to such of us, who make a very slight inquiry into our own Condition, and think better of our selves, than we ought to think. And such of us I earnestly advise, as we wou'd discharge our Duty to God and our selves, as we value our Peace within our own Breasts, and with Heaven, to be very strict and diligent in calling
our

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our own Ways to remembrance. The most notorious Passages, the most provoking Crimes of our Lives cannot well escape our Notice. And for these a particular Repentance is absolutely requir'd. Indeed, as to all other Errors and Infirmities, we ought to be as particular in our Observations as possible. But when a particular Knowledge is impossible to be attain'd to, a general Repentance will be accepted, and prove available to *Remission* and *Salvation*.

Yet amongst the rest of our notorious Sins, let us with an especial care examine well that *darling Vice* of which we have been the most frequently guilty, and with which we are now the more easily overcome. And I urge this especial Examination upon us, not only because the guilt and danger appears to be the deeper but because we are apt to be partial, to be bias'd, to be insincere in our Judgment of it. For, as we are unwilling to give our selves the trouble of making inquiries of this nature, for fear of finding something to cross our Inclinations; so shou'd we search, we shall be very hardly brought to entertain an ill Opinion of what we love and have a mind to practise.

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Thirdly, The last General Direction I shall offer, is, A *frequent* and *daily* Examination of our Lives.

The Duty of *Self-examination* can never be easy to that Man, who has not fix'd frequent Periods and Returns for its Performance. It is the same in Spirituals, as it is in Temporals. For, as he is not a likely Man to thrive in the World, who does not often look into his Concerns, to *state* and *balance* his Expences and his Income; so that *Christian*, who seldom or never surveys his own Actions, will let his Account run so long by Neglect, that he will not know where to begin; and when begun, cannot tell where to end. At least such careless Indifferency for some time will make the Examining of our selves both uneasy and unpleasant. To prevent these Inconveniencies, I heartily recommend to every one of us, a daily and constant Examination of our Lives and Actions.

This was such Advice as *Pythagoras*, an Heathen Philosopher, thought reasonable to give to his Scholars. He strictly charg'd them, never to lay themselves down to rest, never to close their Eyes with

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with Sleep, before they had three times turn'd over in their Minds the Actions of the past *Day*; asking their own Consciences these few Questions: In what have I offended? What have I done? What have I left undone, which I was oblig'd to perform?

And if a Pagan gave such Sage Precepts, read such Lectures, how shou'd a *Christian* blush and be asham'd, not to imitate this Duty, not to exceed in the Performance of it. If we do but seriously consider the *Disorders* of every Day, I am sure we shall find infinite reason to call our selves to an *Account* every Night. Let us commune with our own Hearts, and say, What vain Thoughts have I this Day indulg'd? What rash Words have I spoken? What presumptuous Sins have I fallen into? What good have I omitted? What Vertue have I shown? What Company have I been engag'd in? How did I behave my self in it?

As there is a great deal of Reason for *Self-examination*; so there is, there can be, no particular Precept, nor Instrument so highly conducive, so absolutely necessary to a *Christian Life*. By this the Knowledge of our selves, and our Duty

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is made more *familiar* and *clear*. By this the Performance of *Repentance* will be render'd the more *easy* and *compleat*. By this the Cure of our *Spiritual Diseases* will become the *more certain* and *less painful*.

By this the increase of *small Sins* will be prevented from growing into a *heap*. By this the *Habits* of great Crimes will be *hindred* from being contracted. And, by this we shall be qualify'd and prepar'd for *Death* and *Judgment*. Because he, that reckons with his Soul every Night, will have but one *Day* to account for, when he comes to die. And he, that thus judgeth himself, shall *not be condemned of the LORD*.

ESSAY

ESSAY IV.

OF

Private Prayer.

SECT. I.

*The Nature and Parts of PRAYER
in General.*

HOW far this Duty is mistaken, and how much neglected, I cannot take upon me nicely to censure or determine. But to rectify such as may be *mistaken* in the Nature of *Prayer*, and to convince others who may be *negligent* in the due Performance of it, shall be my Endeavor in this *Essay*.

PRAYER is a pious and affectionate *Ascent* of the Mind to God, express'd in a Set and proper Form of Words. This pious and affectionate *Ascent* of the Mind

is so essential to this Duty, that it is the very Life and Soul of *Prayer*; without which all our Expressions will be lightly regarded by the *Almighty*. For to speak and not to think, to think and not be affected with it, is to mock God, and not to pray unto him. But, when our Words are decent and grave, full, clear and short, and when our Affections go along with our Words, and our Hearts accompany the Action, then may we truly be said to offer up our Prayers unto Him who heareth such Prayers.

Of this Duty there are several Parts. There we are to confess our Sins with shame and sorrow, and Forgiveness is to be implor'd with desire and hope. There we are to acknowledge our weakness and dependance, and Supports must be beg'd suitable to our Necessities. There Divine Grace must be earnestly sought with a firm Belief and Perswasion, that *he will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it*. There the continuance of Food and Raiment for our Natural Life must be requested at the hands of God. And tho' Temporal Blessings, beyond the real Necessaries of Life, shou'd not be frequently made the subjects of our Devotion: yet, if ever they be pray'd for, it must be with
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the deepest Submission to the Divine Will, and for no other Ends, but the Glory of God and Benefit of the World. There we are to express our Gratitude, Love, and Admiration of God for his Goodness and Mercies towards us, in the Blessings of this Life, and the Means and Opportunities of Salvation.

And yet we are not to be mindful of our selves alone, but are oblig'd to intercede for others also; there we are to intercede for the Conversion of the *Jews* and Gentiles, for the Uniting the divided State of *Christendom*, and for the Delivering all wicked *Christians* from Blindness and Hardness of Heart, and Contempt of God's Word and Commandment. There we are to deplore the public and crying Sins of our own Nation, and supplicate the Divine Mercy to remove those Judgments we feel, and to prevent those we fear. There we are to pray, that all of us from the highest to the lowest, both in Church and State, may discharge our several Duties, and become a People Professing the Truths of the *Gospel* in Righteousness. And there we are to pray for our Friends and Relations, Enemies and Benefactors, and all that want or desire our Prayers; That

God wou'd multiply his Blessings both Temporal and Spiritual upon them, and conduct them safely and contentedly thro' this World to a blessed Immortality in the other.

S E C T. II.

The many and powerful Obligations to
PRAYER.

THE Obligations to this Duty will soon appear, when we have consider'd, that we are oblig'd to it by *Precept*, that we are encourag'd to it by *Example*, that it is a Duty which is *honourable*, *pleasant*, and *easy*.

First, We are oblig'd to the Exercise of Prayer by *Precept*.

Our *Blessed Savior* expressly calls upon us, *Mark 13. 33.* to *watch and pray*, *John 16. 23.* to *pray unto the Father*, to *pray unto the Father in his Name*; and *Matth. 7. 7.* to *ask and it shall be given us*, to *seek and we shall find*, to *knock and it shall be opened unto us*. Nay, He commands us, *Luke 18. 1.* *always to pray and not to faint*; and has taught us how to pray,

pray, *Matth. 6. 9. &c.* by prescribing a particular Form to be us'd perpetually in his Church. And what greater *Testimony* would we, or can we have to prove that *Prayer* is the necessary and indispensable Duty of a *Christian*, than these *Precepts* and this *Prescription*, and a multitude of such like.

'Tis the Will and Commandment of the Apostles, That Christians *pray every where*, *1 Tim. 2. 8.* that they *watch unto Prayer*, *1 Pet. 4. 7.* that they *pray without ceasing*, *1 Thess. 5. 17.* that in every thing by *Prayer* they make their requests known unto God, *Philip. 4. 6.* and, That *Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all Men, for Kings, and for all that are in Authority*, *1 Tim. 2. 12.* There cannot be words for any Duty more plain and express, than there are for this.

Secondly, We are encourag'd to this Duty by *Example*.

The wisest Persons in the Heathen World, did make constant Addresses to the God of their Life and the Author of their Being. In the Scriptures there are innumerable Examples of the Patriarchs and Prophets, *Christ* and his Apostles

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files recorded, to provoke the imitation of future Generations. The Divine Composures of *David* are evident Demonstrations of the devout temper of that Prophet. The frequent Watchings and Retirements of our Savior, taken notice of by all the *Evangelists*, do loudly proclaim the pious Homage and Worship he paid to his Father in Heaven. We find the Apostles upon all occasions and at all times, committing their Concerns to God, and giving themselves up to *Prayer*; and from their own Practice strengthen'd the Authority of their *Precepts*, and moved the *Christians* in all Ages to go and do likewise.

The *Vicious* and *Loose* indeed have either wholly neglected it, or perform'd it carelessly, or spoken slightly of it. But the most *Vertuous Christians* have ever tied themselves to the Observance thereof with the utmost Care, Constancy, Solemnity and Affection. And tho' some have prophanely imagined *Ignorance* to be the Mother of *Devotion*; yet Persons of the most improv'd Judgments, Persons who have allow'd themselves time sedately to think of the Grounds of Religion, and actually to consider and attend to those *Grounds*,
have

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have been observ'd to have their *stated* hours of *Prayer*, and make great *Conscience* of so reasonable a Performance.

Thirdly, *Prayer* is a Duty that is *Honourable*; and this is another Obligation to the Practice of it.

We are apt to esteem it a mighty Favor and instance of Respect, to be admitted to the immediate *Presence* of an Earthly Prince and Superior. But to be admitted to a decent *Familiarity* with Him, to have his Ear patient to receive our Petitions, and his Heart ready to comply with our Desires, is still an exceeding increase of Honor.

And Oh! how glorious and transcendent an Honor must it be for Dust and Ashes, sinful Flesh and Blood, to *appear* before the Lord of Hosts, the KING of Kings, the Immortal God, the God that cannot behold Iniquity with Approbation? And yet to speak to this Infinitely *Perfect Being* of all our Wants and Necessities, and to have Him, not only *able*, but *willing*, to afford Supplies upon our Requests, is an Honour above Comprehension, and beyond Expression.

Now

Now when we pray as we ought, we are made partakers of all these Privileges. Then we fall down on our Knees before the Throne of the *Almighty*, and God is peculiarly present with us. Then we offer up our Prayers to our Blessed Savior, who receives them graciously, and presents them passionately to his Father, and pleads the Effusion of his Blood in our behalf, that our Prayers may be prevailing. And what Success may we not expect from so Powerful, so Meritorious an Intercessor? What Hopes may we not raise from this Only and Eternal Son of God, thro' whom God has declar'd Himself to be well-pleas'd with us?

Begin then, O *Christian*! and if thou hast begun, continue this renowned Duty. Whatever be the Thoughts and Practice of others, do not thou value thy Prince above thy God, nor set thy Savior below the Favorites of Kings. Let ambitious and envy'd Mortals croud to the *Court of Temporal Monarchs*; but do thou wait upon thy God in thy Closet, and visit Him in his holy *Temple*; for He is higher than the highest. In Heaven thou art sure of a sincere and affe-

affectionate *Friend*, who is willing to do according to his Power, and able to do according to thy Wants: whilst they make Application to this *Great Lord*, and that Person of *Quality*; and after all, find Favor deceitful, and Tempers fickle, and Friendship treacherous, and their Waiting and Labour to be in vain. Therefore regard thy God, regard thy Savior, regard thy attendance upon them, above the false Grandeur of a transitory World.

Fourthly, Prayer is a Duty that is pleasant, and this is another Engagement to the Practice of it.

Such, as have given themselves wholly or chiefly to the Gratifications of Sense, such, as apply themselves to this Duty only by fits and starts, as the mood takes them; such as these are no proper Judges of the Delights and Complacency of *Devotion*. No wonder their extreme *Sensuality*, or imperfect *Experience*, makes them to reflect upon this Assertion, only as Notional and Imaginary. But those, whose Reason hath a just Dominion over the Body, and who are regular and constant at their Prayers, and have been long accustomed to them; those, I say, can truly tell

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tell the Joy, the Peace, the Comfort of a well-circumstantiated Piety.

I will not say every devout Person at all times meets with sensible Pleasure, and overflowings of inward and spiritual Joy in this Angelical Exercise. Sometimes we are not in a fit frame, temper, and disposition for this Duty: and then great Conflicts and Disturbances may arise, because we are not able to serve God as we ought, or as we wou'd. Sometimes, when we are in a fit temper, God, for wise Reasons, do's not think convenient to afford these Consolations. He seems to hide his Face for a time, and keeps those Excellencies from the Sight and Sense of his Faithful Servants, with which they shine to others, on purpose to preserve their *Humility* or encrease their *Ardency*. 'Tis not reasonable always to expect such *Consolations*, nor always *safe* to have them; and we are not in a fit *Temper* to receive them, and our Prayers may not be the *less* acceptable without them.

Yet a Soul retir'd from the World, abstracted from Sense, taken up with Meditations of Spiritual Matters and another State, and pouring forth it self before God,

God, with Faith and a holy Zeal, with deep Sorrow and humble Prostration; I say, a Soul thus employ'd frequently meets with such invisible Extasies, such secret and unspeakable Joys, from its Union with God the Sovereign Good, from the Breathing of the Holy Spirit, from a broken and contrite Heart, from the Forgiveness of Sins thro' the Blood of *Christ*, that nothing comes so near to Heaven upon Earth. There are Grounds to be joyful, to be delighted in this Sublime Exercise. *There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?* but no Good can be obtain'd, except God *lift up the light of his Countenance upon us.* And this Favor cannot be sooner got, better maintain'd, than by the constant and sincere Practice of *Devotion.*

Fifthly, Prayer is a Duty that is *easy*, and this is another Obligation to the Practice of it.

By the Easiness of this Duty, I do not mean, that no Thought or Preparation is necessary to the Performance. For 'tis advis'd by the wise Son of *Syrach*, *Ecclus. 18. 23. Before thou prayest, prepare thy self, and be not as one that tempteth the Lord.* But when I say this Duty is *easy*,

easy, my Meaning is, that a Person of tolerable Sense in any Station, is *capable* of performing it by an industrious Application of Mind. And this is apparent, whether we consider the *Nature* of the Duty it self; or the *Time* and *Place* requisite to perform it.

The *Easiness* of Prayer is apparent, if we consider the *Nature* of the Duty it self. For the Nature of Prayer implies no more, than the desiring of God things fit to be desired by a Creature. 'Tis expressing our Belief of Divine Providence, and a sense of our own Unworthiness and Sins, and a constant and humble dependence upon Him for all things. And all this is to be done in such a manner as God hath afforded both Capacity and Means of Performance.

So that the meanest Person may offer up his Prayers as acceptably in his way, as the most learned Person in the World, with the nicest Periods of his own Composure. The *Almighty* hears and answers the sincere Intentions of an honest and pious Heart, and those *Groanings which cannot be utter'd*. And tho' to the *Form* of Words we may imagine Him to have the least respect; yet as to Decency

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cency of *Expression*, great Assistances are afforded to the Ignorant and Unlearned. The *Lor'ds Prayer*, the Public *Liturgy* of the *Church*, and the multitude of other pious *Books*, are as so many *Guides* to Devotion. Where we are inform'd, not only of our Wants and what we ought to pray for, but also with what proper words to put up our Petitions to the Throne of Grace, and how to apply them to our own particular Case with little Variation.

As Prayer is in its own Nature easy, and requires neither Strength of Body, nor Greatness of Parts: so no Man can possibly plead, at least with any Justice, the want of *Time* for the Performance of so important a Duty. For Prayer do's not require much time: Because 'tis not so much the *Length* as the *Affection*, the *Importunity*, the *Constancy* of it, that makes it effectual and prevailing.

Besides, half an *Hour*, or an Hour, divided and spent in solemn Retirement at Morning and Evening Prayer, will be sufficient for God's Acceptance and our Advantage. How much *more* we can lay out upon our Souls, must be measur'd by our *Temper*, *Abilities* and *Station*. But so
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much, I dare say, we all have to spare, and I am afraid a great deal more is wasted very vainly and profusely.

Nay, in the midst of Business our Thoughts may ascend to God, with earnest Affections by Sentences unexpress'd, and therefore not capable of being observed by others. The Book of *Psalms* will furnish us with many short and full Sentences for Pardon of Sins, for Divine Grace, for Gratitude and Praise. Which every one of us wou'd do well to treasure up in our Memories, to be us'd in the midst of Company and Employment. I do not prescribe this Practice as any manner of *Excuse* for the more serious and solemn Attendance upon God; but I urge it to shew, that God may be honour'd and call'd upon at all times, and upon all occasions. And also, because this Practice will maintain a devout frame and temper of Soul, and we shall be better qualify'd and dispos'd, when we come more directly to appear before the *Lord* to pray unto Him.

But to compleat my Assertion of the Easiness of Prayer, I add, that every Person do's enjoy, not only *Time*, but *Place* for the performing of it.

In the Public Prayers, whether of a Parish or a Family, we are to assemble our selves together in one place, where all distinctions cease, and God looks upon us with an equal and dis-interested Brow. And when a *Christian* has a true Love for God, and sincerely desires to do his Private Duty, he will find some convenient Retirement to offer up his Prayers. God is with us, and hears us, wherever we appear to address our selves to Him. *Abraham's* Servant pray'd upon his Journey. *Moses* talked with God in the Field. *David* instantly pray'd at Morning, Noon, and Evening; and upon his *Bed* he thought upon God when he was waking, and at Mid-night rose up and sang praise unto Him. *Daniel* pray'd in his Chamber. Our Savior on a Mountain. And St. *Paul* in a Prison. So that to plead the want of a *convenient place* to retire to, as an Excuse to neglect our Duty herein, is a very weak, insincere and shuffling Reason.

From these foregoing Particulars we see then, that Prayer is an easy Duty to him who is willing to pray. Indeed from a Natural Fool, neither this Worship, nor any Obedience is expected or requir'd

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by God in this World; but to a Person, even of mean Parts, of but Common sense, there wants neither Ability, nor Time, nor Place to pray. And since this is the true Stating of our Condition, 'tis a vain pretence to insist upon any of these Heads, to excuse or palliate our Neglect. 'Tis false to say, We cannot do it. And when this is at any time alledg'd, the plain truth of the Matter is, we have no Mind to it, and are resolv'd not to go about it.

S E C T. III.

The exceeding Benefits of PRAYER.

NOW it is Beneficial upon these several Accounts. As it procures God's *Blessings* in our Temporal Affairs, as it proves the best *Antidote* against the Misfortunes, of this World, as it gives a Noble *Disposition* to the Mind, as it is a means of being *restor'd* to the *Divine Favor*, and, as it is necessary to a *Vertuous* and *Christian Life*.

First, Prayer is a Beneficial Duty, as it procures God's *Blessing* in our Temporal Affairs.

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Success is not always answerable to the probability of Second Causes, but there is a Superior Providence which frequently interposeth and ruleth over all. And since nothing can prosper upon Earth without the Direction and Blessing of the *Almighty*, we have great encouragement to pray. Because nothing can sooner Engage this *Almighty Being*, this Superior *Providence* to bless us: For *Prayer* shews an absolute Dependance upon Him for what we want, and He has promis'd to take care of those, who cast their care upon Him.

If then a Man makes conscience of this Duty, God will give him, either great Temporal Blessings, or great Contentment in small ones. Wisdom and Wealth, the increase of the Cattle, and the Fruit of the Ground, Times and Seasons; the power of getting, and the vertue of preserving; the use of what we possess, and contentment under our present circumstances, are all Gifts from the *Lord*: And Godliness hath the promise of the Life that now is. *Joseph's* Piety made every thing that he did to prosper in his hands. At the Prayer of *Elias* the Heaven gave Rain, and the Earth brought forth

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forth her Fruit. By *Prayer* Families are supported, and Kingdoms flourish, our Persons are preserv'd, and in our Employments we go on with Success. And where God denies to such Persons outward Affluence, he compensates their loss by an inward peace and satisfaction with moderate conveniences.

Secondly, 'Tis a Beneficial Duty, as it proves the best *Antidote* against the *Misfortunes* of this World.

This *Remedy* the *Almighty* prescribes unto us, *Psal.* 50. 14, 15. *Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy Vows unto the most Highest, and call upon me in the time of trouble, so will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise me.* And in *St. James*, chap. 5. 13. *Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.*

David took this course in the troubles he experienc'd, and he found strange Supports and a happy Deliverance. And in the 107. *Psalms* he tells us of others, in Storms at Sea, and amongst Enemies upon Land, in Poverty, Hunger, and Prison, being fast bound in Misery and Iron; who, when they cry'd unto the Lord in their Trouble, he deliver'd them out of their Distress. The Lions, *Dan.* 6. forgot their Natural fierceness, for the preservation of the devout *Prophet*.

God

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God will not always *prevent* Misfortunes, but he will be with us at what *time* the Storm shall fall upon us. Whilst we continue in this Vale of Misery, and when we are to pass thro' the Valley of the shadow of Death, upon our Request he will relieve our Spirits with the distant prospect of future Joys, and warm Reflections upon what we shall be, and send his *Holy Spirit* to be our immediate Comforter. He will support us with a strong Faith, and a well-grounded Hope, and an invincible Patience, and can make us as easy *without* several things, as we possibly might be, did we *obtain* them. When we cry unto the *Lord* in the bitterness of our Souls, this is the *Relief* he will afford us, if not perfectly deliver us. And this surely is considerable Encouragement to put up our Addresses unto him.

Thirdly, 'Tis a Beneficial Duty, as it gives a Noble Disposition to the Mind.

The *Mind* is the Noblest part of our Composition; and *Prayer* affords the best Contemplations for the Mind. For before a Man prayeth, and when he is actually at his Prayers, his Thoughts are taken up with the Existence and Perfections of God, and the Wisdom and Goodness of *Providence*; with the Evil

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and Danger of Sin, and the Nature and Number of his own; with an inward Sense of his own Weakness, and the absolute necessity of Divine Grace; with the Shortness and Misery of Humane Life, and the Truth and Certainty of a Future State; with *Meditations* on the Resurrection of the Body, a Future Judgment, Heaven and Hell, and whatever his *Savior* hath said and done, and suffer'd for him.

Now such Thoughts, such Meditations do exalt our Souls, and refine our Natures, maintain the Spirit in its Dominion over the Flesh, and raise our Affections above this lower Earth. Tho' we converse in the World, we live above it. Wrapt up with such Divine Reflections, Material Objects cannot fix any deep or lasting Impressions on us. And to what more honorable pitch can we arrive, than to be employ'd about the best of *Beings*, and the best of *Things*?

Fourthly, Prayer is a Beneficial Duty, as it is a Means of being *restor'd* to the *Divine Favor*.

Confession of our Sins to *Almighty* God is necessary to our Reconciliation with Him; and when it is joyn'd with
actual

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actual *Reformation*, our Pardon is complete. So saith the Scripture, *1 John 1. 9. If we confess our Sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our Sins.* And *Prov. 28. 13. He that covereth his Sins, shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have Mercy.*

I presume none of us will say, he has no occasion to ask God Almighty's pardon, there being not a day passing over our Heads, but affords some subject Matter of Sorrow and Repentance. And since we cannot pray without Confession of our Sins, and since Confession of our Sins is necessary to Forgiveness, I think we have an exceeding Advantage in offering up our Prayers. When we have call'd our selves to an Account, when with hearty Sorrow we have acknowleg'd our selves great Sinners, when we have mention'd our particular *Crimes*, with all the aggravating Circumstances thereof, and with full purpose of Amendment of Life, by God's gracious Covenant in his Son *Christ*, we may hope to be absolv'd.

And Oh! where shall I find Words, what Expressions shall I use, to tell the full Felicity of God's favorable Union with a penitent Soul? What greater
Happi-

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Happiness can there be, than Peace with Heaven? What Joy more transporting, than to think that our sins are forgiven, and that God is reconcil'd unto us? The Treasures of the whole Earth amass'd together, fall vastly short of such a Happiness, such a Joy. And on the contrary, what will all the World avail us, if we be under the Displeasure of God, and want the Hopes of Heaven?

Fifthly, 'Tis a *Beneficial* Duty, as it is necessary to a *Vertuous* and *Christian* Life.

'Tis impossible for any Person to be a good *Christian*, who do's not make Conscience of praying. Because Piety to God is one great Branch of our Duty to Him in this World. And Impiety, being a Breach of positive Commands, will as certainly, as effectually damn us, as Injustice or Debauchery.

And tho' it be not precisely and expressly determin'd in Scripture, how *often* a *Christian* is oblig'd to pray in a Day, and which for no Reason he cannot omit without sinning: yet, when we consider that the Scriptures command us, *Luke* 18. 1. *Alway to pray and not to faint* 1 *Theff.*

5. 17.

§. 17. *to pray without ceasing*, I think we cannot imagine these Expressions to signify less, than saying our Prayers twice a Day at the least. But how much *more* these Expressions may imply, and how much *oftner* 'tis fit and reasonable to pray, must be measur'd from the particular *circumstances* of our Lives, from the *number* and *violence* of our Temptations, and from the *Examples* of pious Saints. Which three Particulars, being sincerely consulted, will give us to understand, that a good *Christian* will pray as often as he has opportunity and ability. This he will think himself oblig'd to do, tho' God has not positively determined the exact measures of this Duty. We see then, that a *Christian* is oblig'd to pray, that every *Christian* ought to pray twice a Day, and that all other *Christians* will pray as much oftner, as their occasions will admit. And therefore to pray, and to pray often, is necessary to a Vertuous and Christian Life.

Besides, Prayer is not only a Duty in it self, without which no Salvation can be had; but it is also necessary to secure our *Standing*, and advance our *Improvement* in Vertue. This it do's, by arming us against the *Success* of Temptations,
and

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and by inspiring us with a new *Principle* of a Divine and Spiritual Life.

There is no State nor Condition in this World, that is exempt from Temptations. Temptations we must expect, either from the Devil, the World, or Our selves. And there is no defence to be had against falling by these Temptations, but by being instant in Prayer. Our Savior gives this Direction, *Matth. 26. 41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation; that ye do not so enter into Temptation, as to be overcome by it.*

St. Paul follow'd this Direction, and succeeded. For thus he speaks, *2 Cor. 12. 7, 8, 9. Least I shou'd be exalted above measure thro' the abundance of Revelations, there was given to me a Thorn in the Flesh, the Messenger of Satan to buffet me. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My Grace is sufficient for thee; for my Strength is made perfect in Weakness.* This was St. Paul's Case.

But whatever may be the Temptations of *any Christian*, upon his Application to God, he may be fully assur'd of such a measure of Grace, as shall keep him, if
not

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not from the Attack, yet from the *Success* of Temptations. Nothing shall hurt the Soul of him, who thus putteth his Trust in God. Some slips indeed he may meet with, but his Enemies shall not prevail against him; provided he be sincere in his Desires, and constant in his Requests, and his Care be equal to his Piety. And if a *Christian* makes any Observations upon his Moral State, I am apt to believe, he may date his Relapses into Sin, either from the *Neglect* or *Slight performance* of this Duty.

As Prayer is necessary to a Vertuous and Christian Life, by arming us against the success of Temptations; so it is also necessary to that end, by inspiring us with a new *Principle* of a *Divine Life*; without which, as we cannot stand, so we must never expect to improve in Vertue and Goodness. To begin and perfect a good Life, we must receive a Supernatural Assistance, and this is chiefly to be obtain'd by Prayer. So saith our Savior, *Luke 11. 13—Your Heavenly Father shall give his holy Spirit to them that ask him.* In Temporal Requests we are oblig'd to be extremely cautious; but in desiring Grace we can never be too earnest, too importunate. In other Cases we pray with submission

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mission and doubt; but in this we may with full Assurance expect what we ask. His Grace he will give to them who pray for it; his Grace he will increase in those who improve it. And by the Grant and Increase of this restraining and assisting Grace, the Strength of our Spiritual Enemies will be weaken'd, and our Natural Weakness strengthen'd, and we enabled to think and do according to God's Will and Pleasure.

This is the way our Savior prescrib'd to secure and improve our Vertue. This is the way by which his faithful and pious Followers triumph'd over Temper, Nature, Inclinations, Habits, and Temptations. This is the way by which their Faith was confirm'd, their Hope well-grounded, their Love to God and his Son *Christ* inflam'd, and their Hearts and Souls nourish'd with all Goodness. By a hearty and frequent Exercise of Devotion, those Persons who are not good at present, cannot long continue bad: And those Persons who are good at present, cannot maintain their ground, much less grow more exemplary, whenever they become cold and careless in praying. So that it is highly expedient to a true Information of God and our selves, to joyn with *Job*, and say,
Job

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Job 35. 32. That which I see not, teach thou me; If I have done Iniquity, I will do so no more. And after this Knowledge, it will be highly expedient for the strengthening of our Vows and Resolutions, to strike in with the devout Psalmist, Psal. 119. 106. and Psal. 17. 5. I have sworn, and am stedfastly purpos'd to keep thy righteous Judgments; O hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my foot-steps do not slide.

S E C T. IV.

Our Savior's Command for Private Prayer consider'd and explain'd.

AS the best things in the World are liable to the worst abuses; so this Duty of Prayer may be prostituted to very base and unworthy Ends. In the beginning of the sixth Chapter of *St. Matthew*, our Savior takes particular notice of some scandalous Abuses of this kind. Amongst which one is, praying for *Vain-glory*, and the *Applause* of Men; and he cautions every Disciple of his against this Ostentatious way of Divine Worship. Instead of praying in the Synagogues and the Corners of the Streets,
places

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places of public and common resort, as the Hypocrites, the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* did, he strictly charges him to retire to his Closet, to some convenient place of *Privacy*. But *when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the Hypocrites are*, who in public Conversation put on an affected sanctify'd Look, and are toning out a Prayer, that the World may see and hear of their Devotion. In all particular intercourses between thee and Heaven, be careful to be as private, as retir'd as thou possibly can'st. For this is his express Command; *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy Closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*

This Precept of Christ is not intended to excuse us from public Divine Worship, nor to render it indifferent and unnecessary. Because in several other places we are commanded to appear before God in his Temple, to go to the *House of God*, not to forsake the assembling of our selves together, as the manner of some is. And moreover, since we need and receive public Mercies and Blessings, there is the highest reason imaginable for a public Confession and Acknowledgment. So that this Command neither derogates
from

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from the Necessity, nor lessens the Obligation of putting up our *Prayers* and *Praises* to God in the *Great Congregation*, and among much People.

Neither can I think it any Offence against this Precept, for others *occasionally* to know the Time and Place of our Retirements: because in abundance of Cases this Knowledge is unavoidable. Such stated Hours of Prayers and Privacy cannot escape the notice of Friends or Attendants in a Family, neither is it necessary it shou'd. Indeed where a *Discovery* of this Nature is so apparently and frequently *voluntary*, as to give the World occasion to censure it as *Ostentatious*, or where it is *designedly* made to catch the vain Applauses of Men, in either of these Cases a Discovery cannot be innocent. But where there is no such real nor apparent Danger, it is not only innocent, but extremely useful for others to be sensible hereof. Because this may provoke their Imitation, and perhaps make them equally observant of the like Duty. And this is an *End* very Christian in the *Design*, and highly Noble in the *Accomplishment*. So that for one *Christian* to know another is gone to pray, is not a Breach of this Command. Such a Know-
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ledge may be useful, and sometimes unavoidable.

Now since our Savior do's not mean, If thou prayest in thy *Closet*, you need not go to the *Church*; nor, if thou enterest into thy *Closet*, 'tis a Sin, if any Person know it, I shall briefly state the positive Nature of this Command, which I take to be this: That every *Christian* is oblig'd to enter into his *Closet* or any secret Apartment, and, when he is there, that he shou'd shut the Door, so as to exclude all Persons whatsoever, either from *observing* or *disturbing* him at his Devotions: and thus privately retir'd from all Company, he is to pray to his Heavenly Father, in such a manner as none but God and his own Soul shall hear, and be privy to his Wants and Desires. These Limitations of our Duty from the Words are very Natural and Literal. And tho' every particular might be enlarg'd upon: yet I think them all to be so exceedingly plain, as not to want it.

The many and considerable Advantages of pious Performances, which I distinctly consider'd in the foregoing Section, will as infallibly attend upon our Prayers in our *Closet*, as upon those offer'd

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offer'd either in our Families or in our Churches. Indeed the Advantages there mention'd, were confin'd to our Temporal and Spiritual security in this World, and gave us only a consequential prospect of the Happiness of such a Practice in the other State. But our *Savior* in this place tells us expressly, that for the practice of Piety here, we shall be infinitely rewarded in Heaven; *And thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* As if he had said, O *Christian*, observe well this *Precept* of private *Devotion*, be zealous and constant in it. You can go no where from the Divine presence; but God is peculiarly present with you wherever you retire to pray unto him. Therefore let your Words be with such Seriousness, and your Behavior with such Reverence, as becomes the Majesty of that God, who sees you, tho' you cannot see him. And then be assur'd, when you go out of this World, when you are call'd before his Tribunal, he will mention your secret Attendances upon him, he will tell before Men and Angels the many Hours you spent in Honour to his Name, and give you an open, ample, and eternal *Recompense*. The more close, the more frequent you appear in this Exercise, God will be the better pleas'd, the higher

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proof you give of your Sincerity, and the greater will be your Reward in Heaven.

S E C T. V.

The peculiar Excellencies of PRIVATE PRAYER.

TIs the Judgment of the *Almighty* concerning himself, *Psal. 50. 23. Whofo offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me.* And every other part of Divine Worship is a certain Acknowledgment and Exaltation of the Divine Perfections. The Omni-presence, the Knowledge, the Goodness and Power of God, are eminently profess'd, and highly declar'd by such Addresses and Petitions. For did we believe God to be *confin'd* within the Circle of Heaven; did we believe him to be as dull and stupid as the Heathen Gods made of wood and stone; did we believe him to be like one of the Furies, a peevish and ill-natur'd Being, difficult to please, hard to be intreated, and delighting in the Miseries of his Creatures; or did we believe him to be stinted in his Power, and unable to relieve us according to our Wants; had we, I say, such Appre-

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Apprehensions of God, then we shou'd have no Temptation to pray unto him, then Prayer wou'd indeed be Foolishness.

But blessed be God, from Natural Reason, from Christian Revelation, we have better Apprehensions of the Divine Nature. And as these Apprehensions excite us to Adoration: so Adoration is a full Testimony of the sublime Thoughts we have entertain'd of God. By praying to God we profess to believe the *Ubiquity* of his Presence, that he is every where, however invisible to bodily Eyes, that he fills every place, and that no Appartment is too close, no Darkness too deep for him to observe. By praying to God, we profess to believe that he is a wise *Being*, that he is infinite in Knowledge, that he is the Governor of the World, and takes notice of Humane Affairs, that he hears our Prayers, understands our Wants, and by what proper Methods to relieve us. By praying to God, we profess to believe, not only that he is an *Omni-present* and infinitely knowing *Being*, but that his Goodness is equal to them both; that he is ready to distribute his Treasures to those that serve him, and call upon him faithfully; Grace without *reserve* he has promis'd to give, and Temporal

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Blessings; pray'd for with *submission* and for *right* ends, he will either grant, or grant a Blessing for desiring them. Lastly, By praying to God, we profess to believe him as able to relieve us according to our Necessities, as he is willing to do for us according to his Power; being firmly perswaded, that his Power is absolute, his Kingdom supreme, and his Dominion universal from Generation to Generation.

Every devout *Christian*, who prays with the Spirit and prays with the Understanding also, will unavoidably have these Notions of God. And a *Creature* cannot glorify a *Creator* in a higher and more acceptable way, than by believing him to be an infinitely perfect and transcendent *Being*, than by worshipping him with the utmost prostration of Soul and Body upon the account of these *Excellencies*, than by professing his own Existence and Dependance to be from him; and that he is nothing, has nothing, and expects nothing, but what immediately flows from his Good-will and Pleasure.

Besides, *Private Prayer* is an excellent Duty, not only upon the account of our honoring God for his *Perfections*, but upon

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upon the account of God's honoring us with his *Presence*.

God is present with all Persons in every place, by his creating and preserving *Providence*: this is his *Natural Presence*. And in this full sense he cannot be excluded from any of the Works of his own Hands, neither do's he exclude himself.

But his *Presence* with good Persons, with good Persons at their Devotions, is in a more eminent and peculiar manner. When we draw nigh to God in Prayer, God will draw near to us with his Presence of Grace and Blessing. There is nothing that makes so close, so lasting, and so gracious an Union between God and our Souls, as *Prayer*. This procures the Blessing of God the Father, the Love of the Eternal Son, and the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Such an Union with the *Sacred Trinity* is the highest Honor Humane Nature is capable of receiving; such an Union breaths Comfort to our Souls, revives our drooping Spirits, and proves an Antepast to the Joys above; such an Union *enlightens* the *Darkness* of the Understanding, and *melts* down the *stubbornness* of the Heart, that we may clearly perceive Spiritual things, and be

deeply affected with them. In such *Addresses* we have the Honor to speak to the *Invisible God*; And, God, unheard, unseen, gives us a silent Information, an Information which comes upon our Souls like Dew into a Fleece of Wool, not so much known by the *Fall*, as by *Effect*. The more frequent, serious, and constant these pious Colloquies are, the more compos'd are our Minds, our Hearts the more sensible, and capable of Divine Impressions; and God unveils himself, as it were, and discovers more of *his* Nature and Will, and *our* own Spiritual Condition. What we do know becomes hereby the more influential, this being the means of God's gracious Presence. And what we do not know, God will take care to inform us, provided it be necessary; and if it be not necessary, then our Ignorance will not be fatal. So that what by God's *Union* made with our Wills, what by the *Discoveries* made to the Understandings, we are bless'd, excellently bless'd with the Divine presence of *Grace* and *Blessing*, which communicates to us both *Truth* and *Happiness*.

Moreover, *Private Prayer* is an excellent Duty, as it is an evident proof of the *sincerity* of our Hearts.

Since

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Since no Mortal can penetrate into the inward Recesses of our Souls, and fully discover upon what Principles we act, it is not for us to assume an Authority to censure the Motives of such Persons, as attend upon the Public Worship of God. And God forbid that we shou'd judge the Principles of any to be insincere, except there be apparent reason for it.

Yet this however may be asserted, that in such a Service, there is *room* left for Ostentation and Vain-glory: whereas in private Addresses to God, these secular and unworthy Principles are *utterly* excluded. A Person may go to *Church* and come to the Duties of a Family, to be thought Religious, to please some Persons, to promote his Interest, to be seen of Men, and to gain applause; and all these ends are impious and hypocritical. But the Devout *Christian* in Retirement cannot be sway'd by any of these Motives. His secret *Piety* must flow from an inward sense of *God* and *Duty*. Nothing else can possibly oblige him to pray, when no Eye do's see him, when no Ear can hear him. Tho' there are a great many sincere devout Worshipers of *God* in Families and *Churches*; yet this I may presume to say, that, when a Person joyns
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in the *Prayers* of the Congregation, but neglects to pray to God in *Private*, he has reason to fear, *his Heart is not aright towards God*. And we cannot give a better *Proof*, offer a fuller *Testimony*, that we are truly good and conscientious *Christians*, than by withdrawing our selves from the World, from our Family, our Friends and Relations to attend upon God, than by putting up our *Petitions* at such times, and in such places, where none but God and our own Consciences are witnesses. This is indeed real Duty. This must proceed from an honest Heart. Here no worldly Ends cou'd be the Motives. Because others are not privy to it, and our Character in the World might be maintain'd without it.

S E C T. VI.

The absolute Necessity of PRIVATE PRAYER.

THE absolute Necessity of this Duty seems to arise in the first place, from the many *Personal Sins* we are guilty of. Which *Personal Sins* are not, and ought not to be included in a *General Confes-*

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Confession, but a particular acknowledgment is absolutely requir'd for them.

Now since we cannot but know what Offences we have committed, what guilt we have contracted, since humane Nature and common Modesty will restrain a Man from declaring his guilt to the World; since Private Confession to any Person whatsoever, is not in it self necessary to Salvation, and since Confession to *Almighty God* is absolutely requir'd in order to Forgiveness, we are strongly oblig'd to seek out some private place where to make our Confession unto him. Not by way of *Information*, for he knows our Life better than we our selves do: but as a Testimony of our *Humility* and *Sorrow* for offending his Divine Majesty.

God knows too many of us stand in too little Aw of our own Consciences. Others thro' the treachery and violence of the *Devil* and their own Lusts, are betray'd into Sin, contrary to their cooler thoughts and sober Reason. And others plot and contrive how to commit wickedness, and by a train of Considerations endeavor to do it the most securely, *That they keep secret every Man in the deep of his Heart.* Now, when we come to examine our
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Consciences, not lightly, and after the manner of dissemblers with God,; but so as to make a thorough Scrutiny into the words of our Mouths, and the Meditations of our Hearts, and the Actions of our Lives; and to observe the Moral Good and Evil in each of them, when by such a Scrutiny we have observ'd the Nature and Number of our relapses into Sin, it is our Duty to retire to express our mournful Humiliation for the many particular secret Sins, which we from time to time most grievously have committed.

And this *Privilege* is not only a *Duty*, but a *Happiness*. 'Tis certainly a happy Privilege that God will meet us wherever we fall down before him, and hear our Prayers, and accept our Persons. By not making *Public Confession* necessary to Salvation, his Goodness plainly appears to be such, as to pardon our Sins, and preserve our Reputation. By this he at once contrives to forgive the Errors we are guilty of, and to prevent their exposing us to the public contempt of the World. And Oh! Let the sense of our many secret Sins and provoking Crimes, of which the World is ignorant, engage us to the Duty and Happiness of *Private Prayer*, as ever we desire the Forgiveness of them at God's Hands.

Again,

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Again, *Private Prayer* is necessary, from the *Private Temptations* and *Dangers* we are expos'd to.

As we have a great deal of secret guilt to confess; so we have abundance of secret corruption to subdue. Which corruption being so various in different Persons, 'tis impossible for any particular form of Prayer to express the spiritual Wants of every individual Person. The public and settled *Prayers* of any *Church* or *Congregation* cannot make sufficient provision for these Cases. And therefore God allows and commands us, to put up our *Supplications* when alone, and pour out our *Souls* before him in private.

Of all Mortals we must know our selves best. We cannot well be ignorant of the peculiar Temptations, to which our Temper and Circumstances do expose us, and where we are the most prone to offend. Sensible we must be of the many and dangerous Enemies we have to resist, and how our Bodies and Souls are encompass'd with threatening Evils, wherever we go, where-ever we are, whatever we do. Every new Occurrence and Change of Life affords fresh matter for Conflict, and calls for new Supplies. And
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our *Private Devotions* must be perform'd in such a manner, as may comprehend these *Spiritual Wants*, these *Temporal Dangers*, with which we are peculiarly encompass'd. For otherwise the *Divine Protection* in these various and emergent *Wants and Dangers*, can neither be implor'd nor obtain'd. Since this is the Nature of our *Spiritual and Temporal State*, no Public Form of Prayer can possibly be suitably adapted to it. And the CLOSET must supply, what the CHURCH is unavoidably *deficient* in.

There we are to tell God, without reserve, with all the freedom imaginable, what *Diseases* our Souls do labour under, and to beg of him to be our *Spiritual Physician*, and not to give us up to the Dominion of any vile Lust or corrupt Affection. When we rise in the *Morning*, his Blessing must be desir'd to conduct us thro' the succeeding Day; that so neither the *Wiles of Satan*, nor the *Treachery* of our own Hearts, nor the Virulence of our *Corporeal Humors* may draw us into Sin, that so we may be deliver'd from vain Thoughts and rash Words, from the ill Examples of Men, and the wicked persuasions of any with whom we converse. In the important and lawful business

ness of our particular Callings, he must be invoc'd to prosper the Work of our Hands, to direct our Thoughts, and guide our Judgments. When we go abroad, we must ask his *Providence* to attend us, as a Defence from evil Accidents, and the Violence of Men; *for with the Lord only there is safety*. And when we lay our selves down to rest, in His Arms we shall *not be afraid*; nay, we may *lie down*, and our *Sleep shall be sweet*.

As our Wants and Dangers may vary, so our *Private Prayers* must undergo the same *Alteration*, to answer the *Necessities* of our changeable *Condition*. Which consideration makes *Private Prayer* a standing and necessary Duty.

Moreover, *Private Prayer* appears to be very necessary, from the *particular Blessings* and *Mercies* we have experienc'd already, and may experience for the future.

We are always receiving from the Hands of God. Most of us do daily experience a new Addition of some peculiar Favor, were we so *wise* as to observe it, or so *grateful* as to treasure it up in our Memories. The reigning power
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of some Sin may be found to be lessen'd, or the Improvement of some Grace come nearer to its perfection. *Success* may have attended our Endeavors, and we been strangely bless'd in our Employments. Our Lives may have been in very imminent Danger, and wonderfully preserv'd by a kind *Providence*. The Hearts of our Enemies may have been turn'd, and they at peace with us, or we endu'd with an extraordinary Meekness. And the Affections of our Benefactors may still continue to contrive and increase our Happiness.

Now these and the like Blessings afford sufficient matter for Praise and Thanksgiving. *Praise* and *Thanksgiving* is one essential part of *Prayer*. And if so, we must retire to perform it perfectly and aright. Because otherwise the *performance* will want that particular Acknowledgment, which our Experience of the *Divine Goodness*, and the strong Ties of Gratitude do absolutely require.

Lastly, Private Prayer is necessary, from the *Examples* as well as *Commands* in Scripture.

As the secret Worshipping of God becomes

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becomes a Duty to *Christians*, not only from the *Command* of our Savior, but also from the *Nature* of our Spiritual State, and the *Reason* of the thing: so we are encourag'd to it by the *Examples* of the *Saints*; whose Practice we are oblig'd to imitate in all things agreeable to Divine Precepts. *Patriarchs, Kings and Prophets*, and *Examples* of both *Sexes*, are recorded in *Scripture* for their retir'd Hours of Devotion. *Early in the Morning*, Psal. 5. 3. *David* directed his Prayer unto God, and did look up. It was the constant custom of the Prophet *Daniel*, Dan. 6. 10. to go into his house, and, his windows being open in his Chamber towards *Jerusalem*, he kneel'd upon his Knees three times a day, and pray'd, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. St. *Matthew* tells us of our Savior, Matth. 14. 23. that, when he had sent the Multitudes away, he went up into a Mountain apart to pray; and when the Evening was come, He was there alone. St. *Mark* informs us, Mark 1. 35. that *CHRIST* rising up a great while before Day, went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there pray'd. And these Retirements are observ'd by the *Evangelists* to be very frequent. The *Apostles*, and all good *Christians*, have constantly

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follow'd his Example herein. And whilst these Instances are turn'd over in our Thoughts, may their Examples prove fruitful in our Lives, that we may follow them, as they follow'd *Christ*, in the sincere and constant Practice of so necessary and excellent a Duty.

S E C T. VII.

The Meaning of vain Repetitions in PRAYER examin'd.

OF all the Duties both of Natural and Reveal'd Religion, there is none of greater Excellency or of more absolute Necessity, than that of praying to God. And if so, 'tis of the highest Importance to be rightly instructed in the due performance of so Noble and Solemn a piece of Divine Worship. Especially there is more Occasion for Directions herein; because Christians are apt to be mistaken in the manner of this Religious Act it self, and run upon the Extremes either of Prophaneness or Superstition; Prophaneness making it a Duty more easy, and Superstition a Duty more troublesome, than it really is.

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He, who commanded us to pray in secret, was doubtless the best qualify'd to teach us *how* to pray. Now after his *Command* in such a case, he offers a cautionary Direction to oppose a material Error, *Matth. 6. 7. But when ye pray use not vain Repetitions, as the Heathen do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking.* And it will be highly advancing to true *Piety* rightly to understand the Extent of this Direction.

It must not be imagin'd, that our Savior by this Precept absolutely condemns *long* Prayers, tho' never so well circumstantiated. A *Christian* may pray a long time, may spend whole Hours in it, provided he has *Time*, *Abilities*, and *Affections* for it. So far is this from being disallow'd, that it is the highest Ornament of a *Christian*, and the true Perfection of a devout Temper. Because it makes our Confession the more compleat, and the Expressions of our Dependance upon GOD the more particular and full, and consequently our Service the more acceptable. Where there is true Sense, much Leisure, and a pious Disposition, a long Prayer cannot fall under a vain Repetition, nor be justly discommended. Because such

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a Prayer by Persons in such Circumstances do's best serve the Ends of Religion.

Neither can it be call'd a vain Repetition to call *back* our Thoughts, and *repeat* our Expressions, when we have experienc'd any dulness or wandrings in our Devotions. If indeed after the Experience of such dulness and such wandrings we still proceed without any Recollection, this Imputation may justly be affix'd to our Prayer. But where there is such a Recollection, no room is left for this Imputation, the Crime of Vain-repetition is utterly excluded. Because a Repetition so circumstantiated demonstrates the deep Sense we have of God's Presence, shews an earnest Desire to have our Requests granted, deplores this Infirmary of Humane Nature, and is the best, the only Remedy that can be us'd in such a Case. The wandering Worshipper in the Public Congregation can only recover himself by revolving the general Sense of the Prayer, and saying to it an hearty *Amen*. But in the Closet this Repetition may and ought to be apply'd. And confident I am, the *Devil* cannot be more effectually baffled, nor the Spirit of God more strongly engag'd to come sooner to our Assistance, than by the Observation of this Rule. We

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We see then what this Precept against using vain Repetitions do's not imply. It do's not condemn long Prayers rightly circumstantiated; neither do's the Recollection of our Thoughts, or the Repeating our Expressions after dulness and wandrings, fall under this Censure.

That which our Savior here condemns, is either *one*, or rather *both* of these two things. The Repeating a Prayer, whether long or short, without *Attention* and *Fervor*. Or, the *Multiplying* idle, empty, and unseasonable words in Prayer, and thinking purely to be heard for their much speaking.

First, The Repeating a Prayer, whether long or short, without *Attention* and *Fervor*; which we are carefully to avoid, when we pray.

This may in the strictest propriety of Speech be call'd *Vain*, as being put up to no purpose. For we have no reason to expect, that God will be ready to hear us, when we do not hear our selves, nor observe what we ask. Or, how can we think he will favorably receive and grant our Petitions, so long as we speak in a cold and indifferent manner; as if it was

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not a Matter of Concern to us, whether our Desires were answer'd or not. Let the Sentences of our Prayers be never so full and short, let our Prayers be put into the most grave, proper and sensible Form imaginable; yet *Coldness* and *Inadvertency* in the Performance, will certainly make it a *Vain-repetition*. A Repetition so far vain, as that it will be neither pleasing to God, nor beneficial to Man.

And there is a great deal of Reason for all this: Because God is an infinitely Wise and Knowing Being, and therefore expects from Rational Creatures a Rational Service. When our Mind and Affections go along with our Petitions, God is truly honor'd, and we assuredly heard and bless'd. This I am sure shou'd be our Aim, and ought to be our highest Regard. But if a Man comes to worship God, whether in the *Church*, *Family* or *Closet*, and kneels before him, and lifts up his Eyes and Hands, and speaks his Petition, and at the same time do's not think what he speaks, and considers not before whom he appears, what he is a doing, and has not his Heart aright towards God, nor endeavors to raise his Affections to Spiritual Matters, can I
call

call *this* Piety? Far be it from me to give it such a Name. 'Tis rather a more serious way of affronting God. God will then complain of us, as he once did of the *Jews* by his Prophet upon the like Occasion, *Isa. 29. 13. This People draw near me with their Mouth, and with their Lips do honor me, but have remov'd their Heart far from me.*

So that all the Forms of Prayer, tho' never so excellently compos'd, all the outward Ceremonies of Devotion, tho' never so exactly observ'd, are only *Mock-formalities*, empty *Pageantry*, *Hypocritical Cringes*, *Vain-repetitions*, except our Hearts and Souls accompany the Action, except we *pray with the Spirit*, and *pray with the Understanding also*.

Secondly, The *multiplying* idle, empty, and unseasonable Words in Prayer, and thinking purely to be heard for this much speaking, is a vain Repetition, which our Savior here condemns.

The former Repetition was defective, not in the *Matter*, but the *Spirit*: But this proves defective in the *Form* it self. The former was a Consequential Offence against this *Precept*: but this latter is condemn'd literally and directly.

Now the peculiar Nature of this Offence is to be gather'd from the *Practice* of the *Heathens*, and from the *Reason* of their Practice. From the Practice of the *Heathens*; because it is said, *When ye pray use not vain repetitions, as the Heathens do.* And from the Reason of their Practice; because it is added, *for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

As to the Practice of the *Heathens*, I shall take the Learned Dr. *Hammond's* Observations and Instances in his Comment upon the Place, and he observes, that it was a Custom amongst them in the worshipping of their false Gods to use abundance of Tautologies; Tautologies, not only in Sense, but even in Words. *Æschylus*, their noted Tragedian, hath near a hundred Verses together made up of the very same words, in their crying to their Gods. The Idolatrous Worshipers in the 1 *Kings* 18. 26. continued from Morning until Noon, saying, O *Baal*, hear us: And the People of *Ephesus*, *Acts* 19. 34. for two hours together, cry'd, Great is *Diana* of the *Ephesians*. But where the Words are not the same, provided the Sense be so, 'tis real Tautology to

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repeat the same Sense, tho' under never such variety of Expressions.

As to the *Reason* of their Practice, that was fetch'd from the expected Success of such Repetitions. And the Expectation of Success upon this account arises from the Principle of thinking God to be altogether such a one as themselves; imagining in reality, what *Elijah* advis'd ironically, 1 *Kings* 18. 27. *Cry aloud, for he is a God, either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.* This is indeed a great Mistake; but they must proceed upon this mistaken Principle, so long as they expect to be heard for their much speaking. For if much speaking in the present sense prevails, it must be, either because God hears not their first Addresses, or because he understands not their first Information, or because his Patience must be perfectly tired out before he grants his Blessing. All which are ridiculous and blasphemous to suppose.

So that the Offence here in Prayer condemn'd is, The speaking unto God the same words, or the same Sense under various Expressions, over and over again at the same time, and thinking the sooner

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to be heard by God Almighty for the sake of these Tautologies. These are the Repetitions, which the *Heathens* practis'd, which our Savior calls *Vain*, which were thought to gain the Acceptance of *Heaven*, and which *Christians* are forbidden to use.

S E C T. VIII.

The Obligations to pray by a FORM.

AS we have the Authority of Divine Precept for calling upon God, so we have the Example of *Christ*, who pray'd by a *Form*, and spake the same words, at different times of waiting upon God. And He plainly shews the *Necessity* of praying by a *Form*, by composing a *Set Form* Himself, leaving it upon *Record*, and enjoining his *Disciples* to use *that* when they pray, tho' not exclusive of other Compositions.

And a *Form of Prayer* is as useful as it is necessary: yea, so far useful, as to advance the Noble *Purposes* of Religion, and the very *End* and *Spirit* of PRAYER. And we cannot so well pray by the *Spirit*, except we pray by a *Form*.

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Now the Truth of my Assertion, I prove thus. To pray by the Spirit is, to pray * *knowingly, affectionately, and heartily*; for such things, and in such a manner, as the *Holy Ghost* in Scripture either commands or allows of. And since this is the *present* and *standing* Notion of Praying by the Spirit, 'tis easy to evince, that the praying truly by the Spirit is better promoted by a *Form*, than without one. And that, as to the *Matter* of our Prayers, the *Manner* of our Expressions, and, the *Heart* and *Affections* which are to attend both.

If we consider the *Matter* of our Prayers, or the Substance of what we ask, that *Christian* is apparently in less Danger of *Erring* in this particular, who prays by a *Premeditated Form*, than he who prays *Extempore*, and utters hasty and sudden Conceptions. Because he, who prays by a *Premeditated Form*, considers the general Wants of Humane Nature, and his own particular Necessities, he distinguishes betwixt Spiritual Graces and Temporal Conveniences; betwixt things absolutely necessary, and things accidentally so; what are good in themselves, and what are made so by moderate Affections and right Ends. And by such

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Considerations and Distinctions he composes his *Prayer*, and is well-prepar'd against *Mistakes* in asking things amiss of God. Whereas he, who prays *Extempore*, and utters hasty and sudden Conceptions, runs a great hazard, either of leaving out something which is necessary to be desired, or of desiring something which, if granted, wou'd make him justly miserable. 'Tis a bold Intrusion to come before God without convenient *Preparation*; and 'tis ten to one but such a bold Intruder proves deficient in the Substance of his Requests.

Moreover, The praying by the Spirit is better promoted by a *Form*, than without one; if we also consider the *Manner* of our Expressions, which is an eminent part of *Prayer*. All Persons have not the same *presence* of Mind, nor the same *command* of Language: neither have the same Persons an equal *presence* of Mind, nor an equal *command* of Language at *all times*. Some things are to be ask'd with Earnestness, and without Condition: and others with a more indifferent Zeal, and a greater Resignation to the *Will* of the *All-wise GOD*.

Now since the Case is thus, 'tis good for every one of us to observe and follow

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low the Advice, which the Wise-man gives, *Eccles. 5. 2. Be not rash with thy Mouth, neither let thine Heart be hasty to utter any thing before God.* As our Wants must be the subjects of our Thoughts, so our Expressions must be adapted to our Wants, and put up in such an humble manner as becomes *Dust and Ashes*, sinful *Flesh and Blood* speaking to the infinite *Purity and Majesty of Heaven*. Which certainly he is best able to perform, who thinks before he speaks, who thinks, not only *what* to say, but *how* to order his Expressions.

Whereas a voluble Tongue teeming the Conceptions of a sudden, if not a rambling Fancy, draws near to God with too much Sawciness and Irreverence, and do's not always escape Impropriety, Nonsense, and Blasphemy. And I heartily wish the great and false Pretenders to *Extempore Praying* wou'd reflect on these things; and, when they appear before God in Prayer, *take heed, that they offend not in their Tongue.*

Lastly, The praying truly by the *Spirit*, is better promoted by a *Form*, than without one; not only as to the *Matter* of our Prayers, or the *Manner* of our
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Expressions, but also, as to the *Heart* and *Affections* which are to attend both.

The Reason hereof is plain. Because he, who prays by a *Premeditated Form*, has nothing else to do but to raise his *Heart* and *Affections* to his *Petition*: whilst he, who prays without a *Form*, is forc'd to study and invent, as well as excite in his Soul a suitable degree of Ardency and Affection. And certainly the Soul cannot be employ'd two ways with as much vigor, as it might be only to one. The former truly feels the substantial Exercise of Religion; the latter must increase in Deadness of Spirit. Such a Person may be said to be rather studying than praying, and can neither joyn with himself nor others with him. He, who prays without a *Form*, may indeed have a distorted Face, and rapturous Gestures; an elevated Motion of bodily Spirits, and a great deal of Heat with little Devotion: whilst he, who prays with studied Thoughts and Expressions, has a serious, lasting, zealous and unaffected Piety; and his Affections in the Noblest Sense are rais'd by the Convictions of his Judgment.

So that we see, to pray by a *Form* is
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Reasonable and Useful, and agreeable to the Precept and Practice of our Savior.

S E C T. IX.

That we are to pray in a Sensible and Brief Form.

IT is the positive Rule of Judgment deliver'd by our Savior, *Luke 12.48.* *Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be requir'd* Now, since there is as much difference in Men's Minds as their outward Features and Fortunes, God expects a Glorification suitable to the Measure of our Abilities. And since we are to pray with the Understanding as well as to pray with the Spirit, we are to employ our parts in composing our Petitions. I do not mean, that our Prayers shou'd be flourish'd with *Tropes* and *Metaphors*, and the lofty Strains of *Rhetoric*; but that every *Christian* is oblig'd first to get regular Thoughts of God, and his own Necessities, and then to dictate these Thoughts with the properest Words and most sensible Expressions, according to his Natural Capacity and Opportunities of Improvement in *Divine Know-*

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Knowledge. And surely it must be a vain Repetition to utter Nonsense in our Addresses to *Almighty GOD*.

I am sure this is the *Best* Use and the *Noblest* Exercise of our Understandings. Let us have the largest Compass of Knowledge; the first and chiefest Employment of this Knowledge must be according to our *Gift*, to make our *Prayer* unto that God, who gave us a power to *think* as well as *live*.

'Tis certainly a preposterous Method, and a rude Affront upon the KING of *Heaven*, to be cautious in our Discourses with Men; and to be loose in our Expressions to him. Such a Crime as this discovers an indecent Boldness, shews the too mean Thoughts we have of GOD, and the extravagant Regard we pay to *Man*. In our Discourses to Men we may be allow'd to be more free and bold; because we then speak to a Fellow-creature, to a Creature perhaps as weak and sinful as our selves. But to speak to GOD, the *Eternal Mind*, to speak to GOD in whom are hid all the Treasures of *Wisdom*, to speak to GOD who is perfectly Holy, *able to save and to destroy*, shou'd strike an Aw upon our Thoughts, and teach us to
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clap our Hands upon our Mouths. Here no Study can be too deep, no Caution too severe.

We must then pray, not only by a *Form*, but by a *Sensible Form*. For to speak improperly by a *Form*, is as great, if not a greater fault, than to speak improperly without one. And this *Sensible Form* must be measur'd according to the different Gifts with which God has endued us. As we are to pray in a *Sensible*, so in a *Brief Form*. By which I mean, that great Care ought to be taken in the Composition of our Prayers, to have our Expressions *full* and *short*. Not so short, as to exclude any real Necessities; nor yet so full, as to include Impertinence and Tautology.

To couch *much* Sense under *few* Words is the highest Perfection of Speech. Because it argues a comprehensive Knowledge of Truth in the Mind. In offering Petitions to our Earthly Superiors, this Brevity and Fulness of Expression is esteem'd the most proper and successful. Because it shews * *Modesty* * *Dr. South.* and *Discretion* in the Petitioner, which makes his Person seen with Favor, and heard with Attention; and his

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Petition either candidly receiv'd, or easily excus'd: and, with respect to the Person who is address'd to, it ascribes a *Sagacity* so quick and piercing, as it were a *Presumption* to inform, and a *Benignity* so great, as it were needless to importune. And if this way of Petitioning be so well esteem'd of, and accepted by a Superior in this World, it must eminently be so in our petitioning of God. God certainly ought to be treated with the highest deference to his *Excellent Perfections*, considering the infinite Distance and Difference there is betwixt God and the greatest *Potestate* upon *Earth*.

There is moreover a great deal of Reason upon several accounts, why we shou'd be *short* and *full* in the offering up our Prayers. For our *Savior*, teaching us how to pray, prescrib'd a Short and Comprehensive Form, which he commanded us to peruse. When He was in his deepest Agony of Fear, he was indeed extremely earnest, but very brief in his addressing himself to his *Heavenly Father*. So that we have both his Example and Direction, not to be prolix nor tedious in our *Devotions*.

Besides, God knows what things we have need of, before we ask him. And there-

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therefore no more words are necessary, than to acknowledge our Wants and Necessities, and express our Honor and Obedience, Humility and Dependance. All which may be drawn up into a narrow Compass. *Prayer* do's not prevail with the *Almighty*, as words do in Humane Converse, by way of Information, by way of Persuasion, or tiring Patience. No; God is not to be wrought upon by any of these ways. The Efficacy of *Prayer* is not by a *Natural* Casualty, but by Vertue of God's *Promise*. He has promis'd to hear us, if we ask in Confidence of the *Merits* and *Mediation* of his *Son*. And upon this account we come with boldness to the *Throne* of *Grace*, and ought to let our Words be few. God will not hear us the sooner for our much Speaking; nor the less, when we pray in a Form that is *sensible, full and short*.

Nay, Brevity and Fulness of Expression in *Prayer* will be *soonest* heard. Because such a Method so strikes in with the Infirmities of Humane Nature, as to enable a *Christian* to pray in the most acceptable Manner. For whoever considers, how our Souls are subject to the *ebbs* and *flows* of bodily Spirits within us, and the Multiplicity of Objects without us, he will con-

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clude, that it is impossible for the same Person to maintain the same Fervor and Attention in a *long Prayer*, as he can in a *short* one. And therefore whatever advances the *Fervor* and *Attention* of *Prayer*, must make way for its *Acceptance* with the *Almighty*. Which being really true, as to the cutting off unnecessary enlargements in our Petitions to *Heaven*, and drawing them up into as full and narrow a Compass as possible, shou'd engage us to observe the Command of *Christ*, not to use *vain Repetitions* when we *pray*, and to avoid the Errors of the *Heathens*, who vainly think they shall be heard for their much speaking.

S E C T. X.

*The Case of Wandring Thoughts in
PRAYER introduc'd and stated.*

I N this Section I shall take occasion to consider, how extremely difficult it is to keep the Mind long intent upon *any* Object; how much more difficult it is to keep it intent upon *Spiritual* Objects, and, that it is the *most* difficult to preserve Intenfeness of Thoughts upon *Spiritual* Objects at the time of our *Devotions*.

First,

First, How extremely difficult it is to keep the Mind long intent upon *any* Object.

As we experience within us a *Power* to think: so we find by the same Experience, that we have so far a command over our Thoughts, as to vindicate the *Liberty* of our Natures. For we now think on this Subject, and immediately upon another, at our own pleasure.

But, notwithstanding this *Power*, we unhappily want so perfect a Sway, as to have a continu'd chain of fix'd Thoughts for any considerable time, without a distinct interview of Fancy. 'Tis common for the *Mind* to begin with, and resolve upon one Subject, and in a little time *abundance* of different Notions crowd in so fast, that we lose the sight of our first Contemplation. And indeed it is not *unaccountable*, that it shou'd be so. For we have various *Desires* and *Passions*, which are very apt to rise within us, even in our deepest Meditations. And our Thoughts do naturally run according to the Compass of our Affections.

Besides, whilst we are in the Body, the

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Operations of our Minds in a great measure depend upon the *Nature* and *Motion* of our Blood and Spirits. Which, being subject to various ebbs and flows, must reciprocally occasion a Fluctuation and Levity in the Understanding. Either thro' the Excess or Defect, the Lightness or Grossness, the too Quick or too Slow Motion of bodily Spirits, our Reason cannot proceed in its Exercise without Interruption.

Nay farther, where-ever we are, we must be encompass'd with *variety* of *Objects*, which strike upon our outward Senses, and occasion various Sensations in our Mind and Soul. These Impressions are unavoidable; and yet what we see, and what we hear, snaps the chain of our Thoughts, and calls off our *Meditations*.

So that tho' we have a *Power* to think, a *Power* to think now upon this Subject, and anon upon another: yet what thro' the various Desires and Passions of our Minds, what thro' the Impressions of outward Objects, and the Sensations in our Souls upon those Impressions, we truly find, that we cannot be long intent upon any one Subject without Interruption.

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Secondly, If long Intenseness of Thought be so extremely difficult upon any Object in general, it is much more so upon *Spiritual* Objects. For as the Reasons I have already urg'd, conclude more strongly in this case, than in the former; so in *this* case there are additional Reasons to strengthen the present Assertion.

Moral and *Spiritual Truths* are of a more abstracted Nature, than those of Sense, and are more dark and mysterious, and have respect to a future State. And therefore it cannot be expected, that we shou'd be so much affected with them, nor dwell so long upon them, as upon those, which we can comprehend, which we see and feel, and daily converse with. For tho' the Arguments for these Truths be very clear and convincing, and the Objections against them very weak and frivolous, when compar'd with the Arguments for them; yet these Reflections call for much more Application of Mind, than others of a sensible, immediate and present concern. And as we are much sooner tired with these Reflections, because they require such Abstractedness of Thought: so by the way, the sense of this Imper-

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fection shou'd however engage us to more frequent Meditations upon such Objects, to remedy, as far as possible, this unavoidable Infirmary, and make *Divine Truths* more familiar to our Thoughts, and more influential upon our *Practice*.

Besides, The *Nature of Man*, as well as the Nature of the *Truths*, makes it more difficult for the Mind to be intense upon Spiritual Objects, than any other. Such is the present Corruption and Depravation of Humane Nature, that good Thoughts are now disagreeable to our *Inclinations*. By the Fall, the Soul is de-thron'd from its just *Dominion* and *Empire*, and made a shackled Captive to the *Body*. Pious *Meditations* upon Divine Subjects being so much against the grain of our sensible Desires, we are with some difficulty brought to think of them, and soon tir'd with them.

If we consult either *Others* or *Our Selves*, we may be easily convinc'd of this *Truth*.

When out of Love and Friendship we discourse with some Persons about the *Principles* of *Faith* and *Vertue*, there is a strange Uneasiness discover'd thereupon;

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on; they receive us with Coldness and Indifferency, and are ready to turn the Stream of the *Discourse*, and call a new Cause. But talk with the same Persons about the Health of their Bodies, or the Increase of Trade, or the Security of their Estates, or the Gratification of any Sensual Appetite, or the Affairs of the Neighborhood, or Public News, where there is a cheap Farm to be lett, or a good Purchase to be bought, or how to sell dear; Oh! with what apparent Eagerness do they attend, and with grateful Expressions embrace us as their real Friends. Now this *Uneasiness* and *Joy* upon these various Subjects, do's sufficiently discover the *Nature* of their *Thoughts*, and the *Bent* of their Desires.

This *Observation* is as true of *Our selves*, as of others. We actually perceive a longer and deeper Attention to any thing, which carries in the front sensible Pleasure and present Profit, than we have to *God*, or *Death*, or *Judgment*, or *Heaven*, or *Hell*, or any thing else that our *Savior* hath said, or done, or suffer'd for us. The *former* Thoughts are caress'd, and bid ten thousand Welcomes; the *latter* we are shy of, and after a short interview and cold entertainment, they
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are dismiss'd. The *latter* we receive as Strangers and disagreeable Visitants, uneasy whilst they stay, and glad when they are gone; but the *former* are our joyful Guests, and old Acquaintance, and with open Hands, enlarged Hearts, and impatient Affections we run to meet them.

The most exalted *Christians* in some measure experience this Infelicity. For, after they have endeavour'd to silence their Senses and Passions, and reduce their Minds to Seriousness and Sobriety, and begun after this Preparation to think upon any one Divine Subject, as they found a great deal of difficulty to bring their Minds to it, so their Minds cannot continue long upon that uneasy stretch. And this arises, not only from the mysterious and abstracted Nature of the Truths themselves, but from the *depraved* Nature of Man, which is to receive them; and which, since the Fall, has a kind of an Aversion to such a sort of Thoughts.

Thirdly, If long Intensity of Thought be so extremely difficult upon any Object in general, and much more so upon *Spiritual* Objects, it is the most of all difficult to keep the Mind long intent upon Spiritual Objects at the *time* of our *Devotions*. Wan-

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Wandering Thoughts and Interruptions in *Prayer*, are what all *Christians* more or less do really perceive in themselves. And what the truly *Pious* do sometimes so *unmeasurably* lament, as to betray a Despair of Acceptance with God. How far any Person may be guilty herein, is not within my Capacity to determine. It must be left to every Man's particular Conscience to examine, whether his Thoughts have not been about his Harvest, his Money, his Shop, his Pleasure, and perhaps his Vice, and many other Imaginations, when they shou'd have been attending upon his *Prayers*: there neither is, nor needs any other proof of this Matter, than our own Judgments in the Case.

But tho' we are too well assur'd of the want of a perfect and continued attention in *Prayer*, yet it will highly become us to inquire into the *Causes* and *Sinfulness* of the same, that we may know, to what to ascribe it, and how far it is a Crime to us.

Doubtless the Passions of our Minds, and the Composition of our Blood and Spirits, and the Impressions of outward Objects, do largely contribute to unsettle
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our Mind in this, as they do in any other, *Contemplation*. And to be sure, the present Depravation of Humane Nature, and the Nature of Moral and Divine Truths, do as strongly influence and prevail to divert our Thoughts in our *Devotions*, as they do our *Meditations* upon Spiritual Objects at any other time.

Yet, besides these *Five Causes*, there is moreover a malicious and powerful *Devil*, who uses all his industry and subtlety to make these Causes the more prevailing to disturb us, particularly at our *Prayers*. He is indeed daily fighting and troubling us, and applying his Stratagems and Temptations upon all Occasions to overcome us: but never more vigorously, I believe, than to withdraw our Attention in the performance of Divine Worship. This I think we have reason to believe, not only because he is a Spirit, and so can act upon our Minds, but because 'tis his highest Interest so to do. For 'tis by fervent Prayer we are enabled from above to resist the *Devil*; to keep from falling, and improve in Goodness. And therefore if he can break off our Commerce with *Heaven*, and hinder the Efficacy of our Devotions, we can neither victoriously triumph nor stand our Ground.

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By this means he advances his own Kingdom upon Earth, and reigns over the Children of Disobedience.

Nay, We have reason to believe the *Devil* to be a great Instrument in the wandrings at our *Prayers*; not only because he is a Spirit, and so can act upon our Minds; not only because 'tis his Interest so to do, but because we generally find a greater freedom in the Operations of our Mind both before and after our Devotions, than we have at the actual Exercise of them. A greater Freedom, not only in worldly Matters and Philosophical Contemplations, but even as to Moral and Divine Truths.

Thus far I have consider'd, the Matter of Fact, and the Causes of our Wandrings in Prayer.

The next thing I am to inquire into, is, the *sinfulness* of the same. Now these three following Rules I lay down in general, whereby to judge our selves, and proceed in the Determination of the present Case under Examination and Inquiry. *First*, If we voluntarily and of our own accord raise and excite any other Thoughts within us at our Prayers; Or,
• *Second-*

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Secondly, If we indulge any Thoughts when rais'd; indulge them so far as to be pleas'd with them, or give encouragement to them; Or, *Thirdly*, If we do not use all proper means to resist and avoid them: In any of these three Cases, the Wandrings in Prayer are really a Crime.

Thus circumstantiated they are a Sin, let the Nature of our Thoughts be what they will. If our Imaginations be employ'd upon a *sinful* Object, then there is the Aggravation of a double Guilt; there is the sinful Thought, and the sinful Thought that occasions the Wandring. If our Imaginations be employ'd upon Objects *indifferent* in their own Natures, by being so far *mis-plac'd* and *mis-tim'd*, as to prove inconsistent with the Duty of Piety, they cease to be indifferent and become unlawful. Nay, Other Thoughts, tho' in themselves really Excellent and Divine, wou'd then prove wicked Thoughts, by being forreign to the Matter in hand; and do then certainly arise, not from the *Spirit* of God, but the *Suggestions* of Satan.

Now we may readily perceive, whether we chuse to raise, or chuse to indulge, wandring Thoughts in Prayer; whether

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we are pleas'd, or displeas'd with them. This we cannot but know, and by consequence may discover, as to the two first Rules, whether our Wandrings are excusable or not excusable, whether they are our Unhappiness, or our Crime.

But as to the last Rule, which has respect to the use of proper Means to resist and avoid them, there is occasion for some farther Consideration. Because some Persons may err thro' Ignorance, not knowing what Means to use. And others may be scrupulous and doubtful, thinking they have not us'd what Means they might and ought to have done. For these Ends 'tis necessary to examine this Point, and the Examination thereof will be the Subject of the following *Section*.

S E C T. XI.

Proper Remedies against Wandring

Thoughts in Prayer propos'd.

MY Design is to insist upon and lay down what proper Means we *Christians* are to use, to remedy, as far as possible, this Infirmary of Humane Nature
con-

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concerning wandring Thoughts in Prayer:
At least so far to remedy it, as that it may
not become sin to us, nor hinder our im-
perfect Prayers from being acceptable to
God. And,

First, Prayer it self must be us'd as a
Remedy against Wandring in Prayer.
That is, we must beg of God to give us
an attentive Mind and an affectionate
Heart, suitable to his *Divine Majesty*
before whom we appear, and the Im-
portance of the *Petitions* we are to of-
fer. At our first entrance into the Church,
it is usual, laudable and necessary to fall
down on our Knees, and say a short
Collect for a pious Disposition of Soul,
and a deep sense of Spiritual things. And
there are the same Reasons to pursue the
like Method in our Closets. Nay, in the
midst of *Public* and *Private Devotions*,
an *Ejaculation* may be frequently put up
to this purpose, with a great deal of Af-
fection and Advantage.

The Reasonableness of this Rule is
plain. For as *every good and perfect gift*
is from above; so the Spirit of God do's
particularly help forward the Spirit of
Prayer and *Supplication*. So saith the
Apostle, *Rom. 8. 26. The Spirit also help-*
eth

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eth our infirmities : For we know not what we shou'd pray for as we ought ; but the Spirit it self maketh intercession for us with groanings, which cannot be utter'd. Which words do sufficiently discover, that the *Holy Ghost* is a great Assistant in the right manner of praying, tho' not exclusive of Moral Industry. And *Prayer* most certainly joyn'd with our own Endeavors is an excellent means to fix our Thoughts, and raise our Affections at the time of our *Devotions*.

Secondly, 'Tis necessary for us in such a Case to observe the Advice given us by the wise Son of *Syrach*, *Ecclus.* 18. 23. *Before thou prayest, prepare thy self.* Now this kind of Preparation, is, by discharging our Minds of worldly affairs, and by previous Reflections upon God and our Duty.

One part of this Preparation, is, by *discharging* our Minds of *Worldly Affairs*. Because our Thoughts cannot be readily nor suddenly turn'd from Temporal to Spiritual Concerns. If we come immediately from our Markets, or our Shops, or Philosophical Contemplations, from the Court, the Bar, or the *Exchange*, it is generally found that some Tracings and

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Images left by the deep and warm Engagements, there, will crowd in to disturb us at our Prayers. And for this Reason it is highly expedient, before we begin this solemn Duty, to sequester our selves a little from the World, and allow a small portion of Time for our Affections to cool, and our Thoughts to retire. Thus we shall have more Leisure and Freedom to converse with our God.

The other part of Preparation, is, by *previous Reflections* upon God and our Duty. The former Preparation is only in order to this; and *Divine Meditations* antecedent to Prayer will excite Attention, and raise the Spirit of *Devotion*.

'Tis neither usual nor modest for an earthly Subject, to rush with boldness into the presence of his Prince, so far is he from this, that upon his approach the Majestic Appearance of his *Dread Sovereign* is in his Thoughts, and what he intends to ask, he muses in his Head. And with this *Preparation* he is in little danger of mistaking either in his Behavior or Petition. Now since there is no comparison betwixt the Immortal God and a Mortal Monarch, when we come to meet the *Lord*, as every one do's who go's to pray, we ought

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ought not to shew less Reverence to him, than to one of our Superiors in this World. But how much greater *Reverence* we ought to pay, we may easily imagine.

If the Votaries of Heaven, before they kneeled down to pray, wou'd for a little time exclude all Thoughts of the World and Secular Business, and then consider the Nature and Perfections of God, the Parts, Ends and Reasons of *Prayer*; what absolute Necessity they have for Pardon, and how vain, weak and miserable they are without Divine Grace, sure I am, their Hearts wou'd be more fix'd, and Wandrings and Interruptions in a great measure prevented.

Thirdly, We must contrive to draw up, what we have to say to *God*, in as *full* a manner as possible, and then take care to *divide* this Matter into several short Collects. For since all Persons are not equally devout, nor the same Persons equally devout at all times, in the practical Observation and Exercise of this Rule, great care is to be us'd to take the Advantage of our Tempers, and say more or fewer of these Collects, according as we find our selves dispos'd.

When by Prayer, Retiring from the World, and *Divine* Meditations, we can work, our selves into a due Composure of Soul, and the Body is in a fit Disposition to go along with, and assist the Operations of the Mind; then by no means let us stop, till we have finish'd the whole course of our Devotions. But when after all our Endeavors we begin to grow weary thro' the Indisposition of our Bodies and Minds, then the Divisions of our Prayers into many Collects will be found to be useful. For as there is no Person, I verily believe, but with a little Application is able to say a short Prayer with Fervor and Attention; so, when his Attention and Fervor flag, he may leave off for a time and have Intermissions, without Reflection upon God or Prejudice to himself. Only in this Case 'tis advis'd to be more frequent, at least so frequent, as to go thro' the whole course of our *Devotions* twice a Day. And if what is wanting in *Length*, be made up with *Frequency* and *Earnestness* of Spirit, we shall not in the *Issue* be losers by it.

Fourthly, Let us strictly oblige our selves to a constant *Repetition* upon the Experience of every Wandering. For as
this

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this makes a kind of an Atonement for the Error or Unhappiness of interrupting Thoughts; so by such a Method we shall the more effectually and speedily recover our Attention. Because God will be more ready to supply us with his Grace to enable us to pray, when he sees us so desirous pray as we ought. And the *Devil* will probably be discourag'd from such kind of Temptations, when he perceives, they tend to increase our Care and double our Diligence. And the Petition by this Recollection will be receiv'd, or something better granted in its stead, as *Infinite Wisdom* shall direct and determine.

Fifthly and Lastly, There is one Rule against wandring of Thoughts in prayer still left, which I recommend to the Practice of every *Christian*; but leaving it with all to his own Judgment to use, as he by experience shall find it advantageous to this end. The *Rule* is this, to say our Prayers *silently*, and in the *dark*.

By saying our Prayers *silently*, I mean *Mental Prayer*; or, the revolving the Sense and Form of Words in our Thoughts. And as for the other part of the *Rule*, the saying our Prayers in

the *dark*, I must needs own in Vindication of it, that 'tis the concurring Judgment and Approbation of most Wise men, that *Darkness* is an exceeding Help to Stediness of Thought. Contemplative Persons find this true by their own Experience, equally true in the Study of *Piety*, as any other. When our outward Senses are darken'd, the Mind is generally the fullest of *Light*. The thick *Darkness* of the Night, or the closing our Eyes in the Day, is an admirable Instrument to intense Devotion, by excluding the Impressions of outward Objects, which wou'd divert our Minds from our Duty.

S E C T. XII.

An Application of the Case of Wandring Thoughts in PRAYER, made to the Prophane and Conscientious.

FROM the foregoing Considerations, I shall endeavor to make a suitable Application to the *Prophane* and *Conscientious*. To the *Prophane*, that they may *discover* their Guilt: To the *Conscientious*, that they may be *satisfy'd* in their Scruples.

First,

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First, To the Prophane, that they may discover their Guilt.

I am afraid, many who call themselves *Christians*, pass off Wandrings in *Prayer* without Remorse, and endeavor to prevent them with little or no Care, if they do not encourage and raise them by choice. But alas such Persons are really inexcusable; and what they pretend to be their Unhappiness, is truly become their Crime. For 'tis not their pleading, they are now in a compound State, and the Body hinders the Vision and Elevation of the Soul, and they are not able to serve God as they desire, that will excuse their Grief or their Endeavors. This wou'd be to couch wilful Transgressions under Natural Infirmities.

If there be any Readers, who indulge Wandering Thoughts at the time of Divine Service, if there be any Readers, who are not heartily grieved at these Imperfections when rais'd against their Wills, if there be any Readers who do not use both Natural and Religious means to hinder them, let not their Consciences be easily satisfy'd with the Innocency and Acceptance of their Performance. Guilty

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they stand before God of vain Repetitions, and their *Prayers* are turn'd into *Sin*.

Nay moreover, 'Tis not the Covenant of Grace that in such a Case will help them out. Because even under the *Gospel*, God expects such a Service, as, according to the best Exercise of their Perfections, they are able to pay unto him: And he also expects, that they shou'd truly mourn, when they can pay him no more. 'Tis an exceeding Happiness and a mightily Privilege, that our Endeavors to pray as we ought thro' CHRIST shall be accepted. But where Care and Piety is wanting, our imperfect Service is not Weakness but Wilfulness. I now apply my self,

Secondly, To the *Conscientious*, that they may be *satisfy'd* in their Scruples.

The chief Unhappiness which pious *Christians* experience, is, that they are not able to serve God as they ought, or as they wou'd. And this Unhappiness sometimes arises to so high a pitch, as to tempt them, either to fear and believe their *Interruptions* in *Prayer* to be imputed unto them for real Sins; or frequently to *forbear*

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bear praying upon the account of their Indispositions.

Now my Design is to silence such Constructions, and remove such Scruples. And the Advances I have hitherto made in the general Argument do's enable me to give a short, and I hope, a full Determination of these particular Cases.

To the First sort of pious Persons; those I mean, who are apt to fear and believe their Interruptions in *Prayer* to be imputed unto them for real Sins, I answer;

First, That *God* has not prescrib'd to us such Laws as are impossible to be kept, and yet dangerous to be broken. And the Application of this *Moral Maxim* to our present Case is plain. For 'tis not in our power to attain to a constant steadiness of Thought in *Prayer*. This perfection of Duty we shall only enjoy in *Heaven*. Therefore 'tis not requir'd of us upon *Earth*, and consequently the falling short of it is not criminal, especially as we are in the *Gospel-state*. But to such I answer,

Secondly, That 'tis in our power to pray,
to

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to retire, and to meditate in order to pray as we ought: 'Tis moreover certainly in our power, to divide our Matter into short Collects, to use these Collects according to our dispositions, to call back our Thoughts, and repeat our Expressions after Wandrings, to pray without the Voice, and close our Eyes. 'Tis undoubtedly in our power to use these or any other Means, which we shall judge convenient to increase Attention and Fervor. And we may in the last place beg *God's* Pardon, that we can serve *Him* no better.

Now *He*, who knows he has done all this, may be satisfy'd as to the Discharge of his Duty, and need not give way to Scruples. Whatever Interruptions he meets with after this, are his Misfortune, not his Sin. *God* will condemn no Man for what he cannot help or hinder. But *He* will certainly reward him, who do's him the best Service he is able, and is griev'd only, because he can do him no better.

And if any doubt shou'd arise in his Heart, whether he has perform'd all he might in the Case, it may be sufficient to determine him aright to say, that *God* accepts of sincere Endeavors: And not to arrive to every Degree of Perfection in any Vertue,
to

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to which we had a *possibility* of arriving, is an Infirmary of Nature, for which I am very willing to hope the *Gospel* hath sufficiently provided. Be persuaded then, O *Christian*, to sit down contented with your sincere Endeavors, to pray as you ought. For after such *sincere* Endeavors, *God* pardons and accepts your Imperfections.

To the second sort of pious Persons, those I mean, who are apt frequently to *forbear* praying upon the account of their *Indispositions*, I determine,

First, That so long as we live in this World, we must never expect to arrive to such a height of *Fervor*, *Faith* and *Love*, as the *GOD* we pray to, and the Blessings we pray for, truly deserve. Because we are intercepted from a clear Sense and full View of Spiritual things. Therefore we must not *forbear* praying upon the account of *Indisposition* in *this* Sense: because then we must always *forbear*. To such I determine,

Secondly, That all the foremention'd *Rules* to dispose us for our Duty, are to be sincerely put in practise. If we *forbear* praying upon the account of *Indispositions*,

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positions, and do not endeavor to remove these *Indispositions*, then we are doubly guilty: Guilty of neglecting our *Prayers*, and guilty of not disposing our selves for them; and one Sin can never excuse nor justify another.

But if we constantly and sincerely endeavor to remove these *Indispositions*, and we find sometimes they cannot be removed; even in this Case I judge it more advisable to say our *Prayers*, than to omit them. Not to pray as long then, as at any other time; nor yet to omit any part of *Prayer*: But to cut off the length of words in expressing those parts.

The Reason why I judge it in this Case to be more advisable to say our *Prayers* with that restriction, than to omit them, is this; because our *Fears*, *Scruples*, and *Doubts* about our *Indispositions*, cannot be so *well* grounded, as our *Obligations* to *Prayer*. For we have the express Laws of God for our *Obligations* to *Prayer*: But for our *Indispositions* we rely upon our own Judgment, which may lead us to Error, either by being too mild or too severe. And certainly then the Judgment of God shou'd sooner sway us, than our own.

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own. Especially when perhaps we have found our selves to have been mistaken. For the Experience of some do tell us, that they have found themselves much better dispos'd after they had begun their *Prayers*, than they thought they were before.

Besides; if we were brought to that Extremity, as to think we sinn'd whether we said our *Prayers* or not, and I was ask'd my Opinion in the matter, I freely own and conclude it the better course to say them, than not. For a less Guilt is contracted by an *imperfect* performance, than a *total* neglect. Because 'tis a greater Sin to neglect the Substance of our Duty, than to err in the Manner of doing it.

Thirdly, Against forbearing to pray upon the account of *Involuntary Indispositions*, I determine, That these *Involuntary Indispositions* will not hinder the *Success* of our Prayers. But provided they be accompany'd with Fear, Trembling, and Grief, as they generally are in pious Persons, they will doubtless prove as effectual and prevailing, as the best Dispositions for Prayer in the World. God sometimes hides the Light of his Countenance from us for wise Reasons, even when

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when his Goodness and Blessings are continued to us.

And as we are not to forbear *praying* upon the account of *Indispositions*, so I cannot conclude this *ESSAY* without leaving this *Observation* upon our Minds, That we are not to forbear continuing in Prayer, tho' our Requests be not immediately granted. Sometimes our Prayers are best answer'd, when they are the most oppos'd. And sometimes *GOD* denies our Suit, because it may be he has a mind to give us an additional Blessing for our *Perseverance* and *Importunity*. 'Tis not for us to prescribe to *Infinite Wisdom*, to tell *GOD* in what, and when, and how, he shall bless us. 'Tis enough for us to express our Wants, and confess our Sins, and then leave it to *Him* to deal with us, as He shall judge the most expedient for us. The *Discipline*, which our *Heavenly Father* puts us under, is always wise and good. And he frequently brings many *Souls* to Himself, and answers their *Petitions* by Means directly contrary to their own Thoughts and Desires. And the Sense of these things shou'd teach us to observe that *Precept* of our *SAVIOUR'S*, *Always to pray and not to faint*, with full Assurance, that *we shall reap, if we faint not.*

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S E C T. XIII.

*Some FORMS of PRAYER humbly
recommended.*

TO compleat this ESSAY, I shall not only direct in the *Theory*, but assist in the *Practice* of Devotion. And the *Assistance* I propose, must be by the *Forms of Prayer* I shall prescribe, and the FORMS I intend to make so clear and so short, as shall be suitable to the Understanding of Persons of the meanest Capacity, and to the daily perusal of Persons of the greatest Business. 'Tis the Spiritual Advancement of *such* I chiefly design to pursue; leaving the *Christians* of higher Perfections and more Leisure, either to their own Thoughts, or the excellent Choice of other larger Compositions. And, as I think, *Morning* and *Evening Prayer* to be the necessary and indispensable Duty of all *Christians* whatsoever; so I shall divide the *Forms* I recommend, to correspond with this double Duty incumbent on us in our Retirements.

PRIVATE

PRIVATE
DEVOTIONS
For the MORNING.

A PRAYER for Devotion in Prayer.

O LORD, my Heavenly Father,
KING of Kings, LORD of Lords,
thou hast commanded me to make
my *Prayers* and *Supplications* before
thee. But how shall I, who am *Dust* and
Ashes, sinful *Flesh* and *Blood*, approach
thy *Throne*? Thro' the *Devil's* Temptations,
the Inconstancy of my own Temper,
the Infirmities of Nature, and my own Neglect,
I sometimes experience an Indisposition
of Spirit for thy *Service*. O let thy Spirit
help my Infirmities, and possess my Heart
with a Reverence some way answerable to thy
Awful MAJESTY before whom I appear,
with a Fervor in some measure suitable to the
great Ends of my Falling low before thy Fool-stool;
that

that I may with a deep *Attention* of Mind think what I utter before thee. I must confess it is an *Honor* and *Advantage* that thou wilt admit me into thy Presence; but let my *Appearance*, by thy *Grace*, be always acceptable in thy Sight, that my *Prayers* may neither return Empty, nor be turn'd into Sin. And this I beg thro' the *Merits* and *Mediation* of *Jesus Christ*. Amen.

A Thanksgiving.

O Most Gracious God, I desire to offer up my humblest Praises unto thee, from a grateful Heart, for all thy *Mercies* and *Favors* vouchsaf'd unto me unworthy Creature as I am. I bless thee for my *Creation*, *Preservation*, and thy *Watching* over me this *Night*, for giving me the *Comforts* as well as *Necessaries* of *Life*, and affording me the *Means* and *Opportunities* of *Salvation*. Enable me to make a wise use and improvement of these inestimable *Blessings*, and to give thee Thanks not only with my *Lips*, but in my *Life*; and do thou continue and renew thy *Mercies* to me every *Morning* and *Evening*, not weighing my *Merits*. I commit my self to thy *Directions*, do with me whatsoever thou pleasest; put

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me into whatsoever Station thou thinkest fit. Only I beseech thee to assist me where-ever I go, and enable me to submit my *Will* to thine, thro' *Jesus Christ* our Lord. *Amen.*

A PRAYER for the Pardon of Sin.

O Merciful God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the Sins of all them that are penitent, according to the multitude of thy *Mercies* in *Christ Jesus*, do away mine *Offences*. With grief I confess, that in many *Instances* I have transgress'd thy righteous *Laws* in a most provoking manner, and the Sins of my *Holy Things* are not the least. Give me, O my God, a true View of my Wretchedness; set before my Mind in lively images the Shame, the Evil, and Danger of my Iniquities, and make me to know my *Transgression* and my *Sin*; that so my *Confession* may be compleat, and my Sorrow such, as shall be accepted with thee, and work a real Change in my *Mind* and *Manners*. Who can tell, how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret *Faults*. Pardon also my presumptuous *Sins*, those particularly of which I have been the most frequently and heinously guilty.

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guilty. [*Here mention your greatest Crimes*] Remember not, LORD, the *Offences* of my Youth, but spare me, I beseech thee, who confess my Sins unto thee; that, whilst my Conscience by Sin is accused, by thy merciful Pardon I may be absolved. Plead the *Merits* of thy *Death*, O Blessed JESUS, in my Behalf, intercede with thy Father to receive me a polluted wretch into Favor, and wash away the Stains of my guilty Soul in thy *Blood*, that it may be presented, pure and without Spot, to thy *Heavenly Father*, and I admitted to reign with thee in thy Kingdom for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A PRAYER for Divine Grace.

O Most mighty God, on whom all things depend, and from whom all good things do come, from a sad Experience I am forc'd to acknowledge my own Weakness and absolute Dependance upon thy *Aid* in Spiritual Wants and Dangers. An higher Principle than that of Nature I stand in need of to govern my unruly Inclinations, and maintain within me the Flame of a Divine and Spiritual Life, even the Comfort and Assistance of thy *Holy Spirit*. O Gracious Father, pity the Condition of thy Adopted Son, and send

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me Help from thy *Holy Place*, and ever more mightily defend me. Make me a clean Heart, O GOD, and renew a right Spirit within me; cast me not away from thy Presence, and take not thy *Holy Spirit* from me: O give me the Comfort of thy Help again, and establish me with thy *Free Spirit*. Let thy Grace descend into my Heart, thy restraining Grace to preserve me from that which is Evil, thy assisting Grace to enable me to do that which is Good; that so by Both I may be built up in *Christian Perfection*, and have the Words of my Mouth, and the *Meditations* of my Heart, and the *Actions* of my Life, always acceptable in thy Sight. From the Heats of Passion, and the Surprise of Lust; from causeless Fears, and groundless Sorrows; from anxious Cares, and distrustful Thoughts; from Melancholy, Despair, and evil Suggestions, Good God deliver me, thro' *Jesus Christ* our Lord. *Amen.*

An Interceding PRAYER.

O LORD, I extend my Petitions for the whole Race of Mankind, as well as for my self. Inlighten those that are in Darkness with the Light of thy Blessed Gospel. Inlighten those that are

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are in Sin with the Light of thy *Divine Grace*. Pardon, Good God, I pray thee pardon the crying Sins of this Nation; our Diversities in Opinion, as well as Debaucheries in Practice: Let them not prevail with thee to send upon us either Temporal or Spiritual Judgments; but suffer the Intercessions and Prayers of thy pious Servants to stop thy Blow and spare thy Heritage. And that we may for the future be a People professing thy *Truth* in Righteousness, bless the *QUEEN*, the *Royal Family*, the *Clergy*, the *Nobility*, the *Gentry*, the *Judges*, the *Magistrates*, and *Commonalty* of the *Land*: And grant that by their *Authority*, their *Examples*, their *Discourse*, and their *Prayers*, they may endeavor to defend thy *Truth*, and promote *Practical Religion*; always remembering the Solemn Account, which they must one day give.

Look down, O LORD, with Pity and Compassion upon those that are in Misery. [*Here mention the particular Persons you pray for*] In the multitude of the Sorrows that they have in their Hearts, do thou let thy Comforts refresh their Souls: Consider their Tempers, their Stations, and their Circumstances, and accordingly support them; and let me be

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an Instrument to do them good, and make them happy. *Lord*, thou knowest I have a Heart to do it, let thy *Providence* give me a Capacity to perform it; but if thou deniest me that, make me contented in my *Impotence*.

Bless these, and those other Persons to whom I am particularly oblig'd. [*Here mention Relations and Benefactors*] Bless them, O *Lord*, not only with temporal Goods, but with a deep Sense of their Sins, with a hearty Sorrow for them, with a humble Confession of them, with fix'd Resolutions against them, with sincere Obedience for the future; that they may glorify thee on Earth by thy *Grace*, and be glorify'd with thee in *Heaven*, thro' the Merits of *Christ*.

And as for my Enemies, let their Behavior never lessen my Charity; and do thou forgive their malicious Designs against me, as I forgive them, and turn their hearts, and work in them all that good, which may make them acceptable in thy Sight, thro' *Jesus Christ* our Lord. *Amen*.

The Conclusion.

O LORD, I am sorry, heartily sorry, that I am not able to serve thee as I ought. Forgive me the Sins of my Holy

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ly Things at this time, and proportion thy Blessings suitable to my Necessities, for thy alone Mercies in *Jesus Christ*. In whose prevailing Name and comprehensive Words, I conclude these my imperfect Prayers.

Our Father which art in Heaven; Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily Bread, and forgive us our Trespases, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil; For thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

For the EVENING.

A PRAYER for Devotion in Prayer.

ALmighty and Everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than I to pray, and art wont to give more than I desire or deserve; help my Infirmities with thy *Holy Spirit*, and dispose my
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Heart and Tongue to glorify thy Name, that thou may'st not cast out my Prayer nor turn thy Mercy from me. And this I beg for *Christ* his sake. *Amen.*

A PRAYER for the Pardon of Sin.

O Almighty God, who rends the Mountains, and tears in pieces the Rocks by thy Power, who art most terrible in thy Judgments against presumptuous Offenders; I, who am sinful Flesh and Blood, lie prostrate at thy Feet, clapping my Hands upon my Mouth, and hiding my Face in the Dust. My Sins have taken such hold upon me, that I am not able to look up; yea, they are more in number than the Hairs of my Head, and my Heart hath failed me. The Sins, O Lord, which I now expressly bewail, which I now particularly confess, are in their Nature heinous, and most provoking in their circumstances. [*Here mention the Crimes and their Circumstances*] What shall I do who have thus long broken thy Laws, wearied thy Patience; dared thy Vengeance, and incensed thy Justice. In the bitterness of my Soul, and from the bottom of my Heart, and upon my bended Knees, I cry for Mercy. Mercy I want, Mercy I
im-

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implore, it is of thy Mercy that I was not long since consumed; and because thy Compassions fail not, Oh! do thou still behold me with an Eye of Pity and Compassion, and look upon me at the same time that thou lookest upon the Sufferings of thy *Son*. Let the *Merits* of his *Death* be ever precious in thy Sight; let his powerful *Intercession* in my behalf enter even into thine Ears, and wash away the stains of my guilty Soul in his Blood. O Lord, hear, and when thou hearest, O Lord, forgive the Offences of my Youth, blot out all my Transgressions, and my Sins and Iniquities do thou remember no more, for *Jesus Christ* his sake. *Amen.*

A PRAYER for Divine Grace.

O GOD, the Fountain of *Knowledge* and *Grace*, inlighten the Darkness of my Understanding, melt down the Stubbornness of my Heart, that I may clearly perceive *Spiritual Things*, and be deeply affected with them. Conduct my Soul thro' all the *Mazes* and *Labyrinths* of *Error*, thro' all the *Wiles* and *Temptations* of *Sin*, to a State of *Truth* and *Purity*. Whilst I am in this World make me, O Lord, stedfastly to believe, seriously to consider, and earnestly to desire those

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those things which thou hast prepar'd for the Righteous when they are departed hence. And that I may obtain those things which thou hast promised, enable me to love and practise those things which thou hast commanded. O let me be pious and devout with Respect to thee; of a humble Resignation to thy *Providential Will*; faithful and just in all my Promises, Designs and Contracts, truly charitable, as I have Opportunity and Ability, to *Enemies* as well as *Friends*: Let me be *Chaste, Temperate, and Sober*; humble in my *Thoughts*, contented with my *Condition*, and improve in every *Grace* and *Vertue*, that I may continue thine for ever, and daily increase in thy *Holy Spirit* more and more, until I come unto thine Everlasting Kingdom. *Amen.*

A Thanksgiving.

O LORD, my *Heavenly Father*, who art kind even to the Unthankful and the Evil; how shall I remember, how shall I express thy abundant Kindness towards me beyond my Deserts? I have tasted the *Goodness* of thy *Providence* in making my *Being* Comfortable and Easy, in supplying my Wants, in relieving my Necessities, in prospering my Endeavors,
in

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in supporting me under Difficulties, and protecting me from Dangers. As soon as I awake, 'tis thou that hast refresh'd me the Night past with moderate Sleep; when I rise, thou followest me with thy Protection and Grace thro' the succeeding Day; when I sit down at Meat, thou spreadest my Table; and when I lie down to rest again, 'tis in thy Arms alone I must securely sleep. But most of all do I own thy bounteous *Mercy* for restraining me from Evil, for exciting me to *Good*, for not striking me dead in the midst of my *Iniquities*, but granting me time and grace, and a relenting Heart to repent, for affording me thy *Ministers*, thy *Angels*, thy *Word* and *Sacraments*, to guide and to confirm me; and sending thy *Mercies* to court me to *Repentance*, and thy *Judgments* to awaken me to *Obedience*. What Reward shall I give unto thee, O LORD, for all these *Benefits* that thou hast done unto me? The least that I can offer, must be *Love* and *Obedience*; and yet that is as much as thou desirest. Give me then, O God, a deep Sense of thy *Goodness* towards me in all respects: Let the Sense of thy *Goodness* towards me teach me to love thee above all things; and let me shew my Love by my Obedience to thy Com-
mandments;

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mandments; and for obeying thy Commandments do thou still delight to do me good, for my *Saviour's* sake. *Amen.*

An Interceeding PRAYER.

O Most glorious *Lord God*, I am not mindful of my self alone, but do supplicate and intreat for all sorts and conditions of Men. Send forth the Light of thy *Gospel Truths* to the Heathen Kingdoms of the Earth, that sit in Darkness and the Shadow of Death. Let the Light of thy Divine Spirit guide and govern the Hearts and Minds of all that profess thy Son's Religion. Pardon, I beseech thee, the public and provoking Sins of this *Nation*: And may we, from the highest to the lowest, lead Lives answerable to those *Opportunities* thou hast given us of doing good. Look down with Pity and Compassion upon those that are in Misery, and give them ease. Bless my Relations and Benefactors, and plentifully reward them. Forgive my Enemies as I forgive them, and turn their Hearts. And grant that they may all arrive at Everlasting *Happiness*, thro' the *Merits* of *Jesus Christ*. *Amen.*

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The Conclusion.

TAKE me into thy *Protection*, O God, this Night and ever, and bless me with moderate and refreshing Sleep, such as may fit me for the Duties of the Day following. And because I am a *Mortal Creature*, and born to die, and know not the time nor manner of my Death, grant that I may every Day prepare for it, that whenever my Soul shall be separated from my Body, and I cease to live in this World, I may be admitted eternally to live with thee in the World to come, thro' *Jesus Christ* our Lord. *Amen.*

Those things, O God, which are farther needful for me, I beseech thee grant me, whether I ask them or not; and those things which are not needful for me, tho' I ask them, yet, O God, deny me. And pardon my unpreparedness of Heart and indisposition of Spirit for thy Service, and let my imperfect Prayers be summ'd up and answer'd in the Name and Words of my dear Redeemer.

Our Father which art in Heaven, &c.

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A short Morning PRAYER.

O Eternal God, thou great Father of Men and Angels, who has protected me the Night past, and brought me safe to the beginning of this Day, I humbly and heartily thank thee for the same, and all other thy past and present Mercies vouchsafed unto me. I confess, O Lord, I am a Sinner, a great one; O let me feel the saving Efficacy and Comfort of thy Divine Mercy in *Christ Jesus*, and forgive me all my Offences! And I beseech thee, enable me seriously to resolve on a good Course, and stedfastly to adhere to my Resolution by thy Grace, which I implore to continue with me, to arm me against the Temptations of the *World*, the *Flesh* and the *Devil*, and to support me in this Vale of Misery with *Faith, Patience, Courage, and Contentment*. Give me, O my God, right Apprehensions of thee and my self, by reading the *Holy Scriptures*; make me to know my Duty and my Sin, that I may speedily repent of the one, and sincerely practise the other; and guide me with a wise, innocent, and prudent Behavior towards all Men. Maintain within my Soul a constant Piety to thee my God; let me discharge

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charge the Duties of *Chastity*, *Temperance*, and *Humility* to my self, and be faithful and honest in all my Dealings and Designs. That at the last my departure may be in Peace, and I may die the Death of the Righteous, and have my End Everlasting Life, thro' *Jesus Christ* our Lord. *Amen.*

Our Father which art in Heaven, &c.

A short Evening PRAYER.

O Merciful God, with humble Reverence and sorrow of Heart I fall low on my Knees before thy Throne. I have sinn'd, I have sinn'd, I have done amiss and dealt wickedly: But 'tis thy property always to have mercy, to thee only it appertaineth to forgive Sins. Plead the Merits of thy Death, O Blessed *Jesus*, in my behalf. Hearken to the Intercessions of thy SON, O *Heavenly Father*. And for his sake remember not the Offences of my Youth, nor those of this Day, nor any others of my past Life, either to my Confusion in this World, or to my eternal Condemnation in the next.

And as I implore thy Mercy to have pity upon my Soul for the time past, so
deliver

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deliver me, I beseech thee, from the Dominion of Sin for the time to come. Enable me by thy *Holy Spirit* to lead a truly Pious, Sober, Chaste and Christian Life, in all *Vertue* and *Goodness*. Accept my grateful Acknowledgment of thy repeated Favors, and teach me to live with an entire Submission to thy *Divine Providence*, Bless my Body with refreshing Sleep this Night, that it may be the better able to serve my Soul, and that both Body and Soul may serve thee with a never-failing Duty. Thus having Respect to thy Commandments, let me have hope in my Death, and give me the Comfortable Expectation of the exceeding and precious *Promises* of thee my God, thro' the Merits of *Jesus Christ* our Lord. *Amen.*

Our Father which art in Heaven, &c.

A Prayer for the SACRAMENT, to be us'd together with our Morning and Evening Devotions, in the Preparation Week.

O Dearest SAVIOR, thou Prince of Peace, altho' I do not believe the consecrated *Bread* and *Wine* to be really changed into thy Natural *Body* and
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and *Blood*, yet by *Faith* do I receive them as thy *Body* and *Blood*, in obedience to thy dying Command; and as a *Sacrament*, whereby I receive the Pardon of my Sins, and Grace is convey'd into my Heart, and thy Death perpetuated to the end of the World. My Soul, O Blessed *Jesus*, groans under the Sense, Conviction and Dominion of many very heinous Iniquities. [*Here mention Particulars*] So confounded is my Mind at the Remembrance of them, as makes me both afraid to come, and yet not dare to keep away from this *Sovereign Remedy*, for the Guilt and Dominion of my Sins. The *Sacrifice* of thee my *God* is a troubled Spirit; a broken and contrite Heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. This I do beseech thee to create in me, and then accept of it for the Merits of my *Savior*. Prepare my Heart fit to receive this *Bread of Life*; may I feel the Blessed Effects of it in my Soul: may it mortify my Corruptions, and by thy crucified *Body*, deliver me from this *Body of Flesh*. O let this *Sacramental Blood* of thine purge my Conscience from dead Works, and be effectual to the Sealing of my Pardon, the weakning of my Corruptions, the strengthening of my Graces, the establishing of my Faith, the enflaming of my Love, the exciting of my

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Devo-

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Devotion, the confirming of my Hope, and the preserving of my Body and Soul unto Everlasting Life. To these Religious Ends, and with these comfortable Considerations, I purpose to eat this *Bread* and drink this *Wine*, in Remembrance of CHRIST's meritorious *Death* and *Passion* for me and all Mankind. *Amen* and *Amen*.

An Ejaculation before the Receiving both the Bread and Wine.

GOD be merciful to me a Sinner.
Make me a clean Heart, O God, and renew a right Spirit within me.

An Ejaculation after the Receiving of the Bread and Wine.

 Glory be to thee, O Lord most high. I have sworn, and am stedfastly purpos'd to keep thy righteous Judgments; O hold thou up my goings in thy Paths, that my footsteps do not slide.

A Thanksgiving after the Sacrament, to be us'd in the Church and at Home.

PRaise the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his Benefits, who healeth all thy Infirmities and forgiveth all thy Sin.
And

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And since thou, O my Savior, art now receiv'd into my Heart, and united unto me, unworthy Creature as I am, grant that I may entertain thee with holy Affections and pious Colloquies, and so tie thee to me by a filial Obedience, that thou may'st continue with me to promote Vertue and Piety in my Life. O Lord, how strengthening is this *Bread*, how refreshing is this *Cup* unto my Soul, which groaned after thee, even as a thirsty Hart after the Water-brooks! I do now rejoyce in thee, my *God*, my *Savior*, and am unfeignedly thankful, in that thou hast by this thy *Body* and *Blood*, seal'd unto me the Pardon of my past Sins, and infus'd within me a new Principle of Spiritual Life, to live better for the time to come. These are the Benefits of thy *Passion*, these are consign'd to me in this *Sacrament*. Praise the *Lord* therefore, O my Soul, while I live will I praise the *Lord*, yea, as long as I have any Being, I will sing Praises unto my God. *Amen.*

A PRAYER at our first Entrance into Church.

O Most Glorious Lord God, I am come to worship in thy Holy Temple: make me more ready to hear and pray,
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than to offer the Sacrifice of Fools. Endue me with the Spirit of *Fervor* and *Attention*, that neither my *Prayers* may return empty, nor thy *Word* read and preach'd prove unfruitful, but that both my Heart and Tongue may glorify thy Name. Grant this, O God, for *Jesus Christ's* sake. *Amen.*

A PRAYER at the ending of Divine Service.

O LORD, with what Confusion do I reflect on my Behavior and Coldness in thy Presence. Pardon, O merciful God, I pray thee pardon whatever has been amiss in my Worship at this time; Supply the Necessities of my Soul, graft in my Heart the Love of thy Name, increase in me true Religion, nourish me with all Goodness, that I may continue thine for ever, for the Sake and Merits of *Jesus Christ* my Only *Mediator* and *Advocate.* *Amen.*

ESSAY

ESSAY V.

OF

Public Worship.

S E C T. I.

*The Obligations to Worship GOD in a
Solemn and Public manner.*

AS far as the Records of *Antiquity* extend, we may perceive, that the very *Heathens* did meet together to worship their Gods and Goddesses in a solemn and *public* way. And altho' they were exceedingly mistaken both in the *Object* and *Manner* of Adoration: yet even their *Mistakes* did effectually prove, that a Solemn and *Public Worship* was highly agreeable to the Light of Nature: whatever difference there might be in various Nations as to some particular *Opinions* and *Customs*, they all generally agreed in *This*.

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Which kind of *Worship* is highly reasonable, *as we are Men*; because of all the visible Creation no Beings besides our selves are capable of joyning together, to give God that *Honor and Glory* which is due unto his Name. *The Heavens* indeed declare the *Glory of God*, and the *Firmament sheweth his Handy-work*: For tho' there be neither *Speech nor Language*, yet their *Voices are heard among them*, their *Sound is gone out into all Lands*, and their *Words into the Ends of the World*. Birds and Beasts do loudly speak their *Maker's Praise*. There is nothing which God has made, but is a proof of his excellent *Perfections*: But Men, who are endued with *understanding Souls*, and with *Speech* to communicate their *Thoughts* to each other, are the *Only Beings* which God has made capable of meeting, agreeing, and bearing reciprocal Parts; in declaring the Submission, Homage, Esteem and Reverence necessary to be paid to the Almighty Creator, and All-wise Governor of the World. And therefore, *O come let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker*, and praise him, and pray unto him in the great Congregation, with concurrent Voices, from the ground of the Heart. God expects a
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Service suitable to the *Perfections* he endues his Creatures with. And the *Divine Worship*, offer'd in the Closet, must not exclude the *Worship* in the Congregation.

Nay farther; the same *Reasons* which oblige us to worship God *at all*, do as *strongly* oblige us to assemble our selves together to worship *Him* in *Public*. For why do I pray unto Him in private, but because I have offended against his holy *Laws*, and stand in need of his *Mercy*, but because I am sensible of my Natural weakness, and am miserable without his *Grace*? Why do I at any time praise him, but because he was my *Creator* at first, and I have experienc'd his *Goodness* ever since I was born, by many repeated *Blessings*, and those too of various kinds?

Now a *Nation* or *Society* may be guilty of Sin, consider'd in that *Capacity*, as well as particular Persons. There may be *Judgments* hanging over a People's head, which wou'd be general to a whole Nation, and involve both Good and Bad, Prince and Subject, in the sad *Calamity*. And there are common and public *Mercies*, whereof all are partakers, that live under such a Government, and are incorporated into a particular *Society*, and are the *Inhabitants* of such a *Country*.

And upon these Accounts we find a rational Obligation to assemble our selves together. For the Confession, Sorrow and Repentance must be as solemn and public as the Guilt; and we are to meet to deplore the prevailing Sins of others, as well as our own, that neither their Iniquity nor ours may effect our Nation's Ruin: This is requir'd with respect to the crying Sins of a Nation. Again, When God's Judgments are in the Earth or near approaching, 'tis time for the Inhabitants of the World to learn Piety: When the Heavens are commanded to give rain in such a Measure, as to cover the Earth with Waters; when Rain is with-held so long that the Earth is parched up for want of Moisture; when the Ground yieldeth no Fruit, and the Cattel fall suddenly dead in numbers, so that the Harvest and Folds do fail; when an infectious Air sweeps away the Inhabitants of a Land, and the contagious Plague no Humane Art can stop; when *Wars and Rumors of Wars* are loudly heard, and dreadful Fires lay fenced Cities into ruinous Heaps; when the Noise and Rattlings of the Firmament above threaten Destruction to the World below; when a Famine is coming upon a People, *not a Famine of Bread, nor a Thirst for Water,*

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Water, but of hearing the words of the Lord; when the *Gospel* is in danger of being taken from us, and the Opportunities of Salvation are remov'd; when such Scenes as these appear, we may truly say, God's Judgments are then in the Earth. And then nothing can be more reasonable for a People at such a time, than to meet, and with united Hearts and Voices lie prostrate before God, and beg that his whole Displeasure may not arise, that he wou'd be merciful to them, and remove those Judgments they feel, and prevent those they fear. Or again, upon the Experience of a sudden extraordinary public Blessing, or the sense of common and continued Mercies, such as Peace, Plenty, and Liberty, a wise Government, and a reform'd Church; I say, upon the Experience and Sense of such Blessings and Mercies, a People is oblig'd in Point of *Justice* and *Gratitude* to make an Universal Acknowledgment, and with joyful Affections adore the God that sent them. If a Nation has been, or is, so signally blessed, if a Nation has, or doth, receive such Instances of Loving Kindness from the *Lord*, even the Light of Nature might call upon the People of that Nation in the Language of the Psalmist, *O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us heartily re-joyce*

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joyce in the strength of our Salvation: Let us come before his presence with Thanksgivings, and shew our selves glad in Him with Psalms.

Whether then we consider a *National Guilt*, or *National Judgments*, or *National Mercies*, we find that *each* of them singly, much more *all* of them together, are strong Arguments from *Natural Reason*, for meeting together and joyning in the *Public Worship* of GOD.

To all which Considerations, I may add this one, That, if the *Private Worship* of God proceeds from the Esteem and Reverence, we have of the Divine *Excellencies*, and is an Expression of Honor to his Name, *Public Worship* is much more so. For to be ador'd in the *Assemblies* of the *Saints*, and to have Praises celebrated by a numerous concourse of Persons of all Degrees and Stations, is a Demonstration of a general regard, and an universal Dependance, and must be of higher Veneration, than that which is singly paid by particular Persons.

So that considering the Sense and Examples of the *Heathens*, as to *Public Worship*, considering that Men are the only Creatures under Heaven capable of meeting

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ing and joyning for such an End; considering the Necessity of this kind of *Service*, with respect to the Guilt, the Judgments and Mercies of a Nation; and considering that this is the highest Honor we are able to offer unto our *God*; I say, considering these things, I think the Obligations to assemble our selves together to worship *God*, in a Solemn and Public manner, appear to be very strong from *Reason*, as we are *Men*.

Many Arguments might be subjoyn'd to these, as we are *Christians*, for the Enforcement of this Duty. But now I shall only mention one, and that is, the Examples of *CHRIST*, and his *Apostles*, and the Primitive *Christians* in all Ages of the Church. As the *Jews* from the first time of their being brought out of *Egypt*, had their Sacred Assemblies and Solemn Meetings, whether the People thought themselves absolutely oblig'd to Resort: so *CHRIST* joyn'd himself to their *Synagogues*, observ'd the Temple-worship, and constantly went with the rest of the Congregation at the appointed Hours of Prayer, and kept the Solemn Feasts of the Church at those times in use. 'Tis frequently mention'd in the *Acts* of the *Apostles*, That they continued with one accord in Prayer,

Prayer, and meet every first day of the Week, and frequently celebrated the *Lord's* Supper, and worship'd God. And where-ever they made and left Converts, almost the First thing which they were taught and thought themselves oblig'd to practise, was, to *Meet* together, to hold *Communion* with each other in *Prayers*, and *Praises*, and *Christian Sacraments*. For tho' they had not at first the Protection of Governments, tho' for a considerable time they wanted peaceful and settled places of *Worship*: Yet being entred into the *Christian Church* or *Society*, so strong was the sense of their Obligation to *Communion*, that neither Rewards nor Punishments cou'd prevail upon them to forsake the *Assembling* of themselves together. Meet they wou'd, tho' they were a hated and persecuted People.

I heartily wish all *Christians* wou'd seriously think upon, and deeply consider, the *Reasons* already urg'd for this Duty. And then I am sure, they will neither absent from, nor slight the *Christian Assemblies*. Then they will no more excuse their not coming to Church, with that *Vain Notion* of Praying and Reading at Home. Then neither the Prejudice to
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the *Minister*, nor a careless Temper, nor the want of fine Cloaths to vie with, and out-vie the rest of their Neighbors, will at any time succeed to keep us from the *Public Congregation*. I mention these Matters, because I know they have been made use of as Excuses and Reasons for absenting from the Church. And I do but just mention them, because they are exceedingly weak in themselves, and intolerably weak, when compar'd with the *Obligations* for Assembling.

S E C T. II.

The Custom of having Places set a part for Public Worship.

Without the Benefit of *History* or *Revelation*, we might fairly suppose such a Practice to prevail from the strong *Obligations* to *Public Worship*. For if the World was oblig'd to assemble together, there must be some *Place* for that purpose. But since we receive Information from Both, and *Histories*, as well *Prophane* as *Sacred*, make mention of such Places, the Matter of Fact is with greater credit transmitted to *Posterity*.

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From the Scriptures and other Authors, we find that the *Heathens* had their *High Places*, their *Groves*, their *Altars*, and their *Temples*, erected and dedicated to their Gods and Goddesses. And to those Places they resorted in great numbers, and had their *Priests* to offer Sacrifices, and perform their Rites and Ceremonies of *Adoration*.

In the Scriptures we read such a *Custom* observ'd, from the beginning of the *Creation*. *Cain* and *Abel*, *Gen.* 4. 3, 4. must be suppos'd to have had their Places, whither they brought their *Offerings* unto the Lord, the One of the *Fruit of the Ground*, and the Other of the *First-lings of his Flock*, and the *Fat thereof*. As soon as the Waters were abated, and *Noah* come out of the *Ark*, *Gen.* 8. 20. he immediately built an *Altar*, and took of every clean *Beast*, and every clean *Fowl*, and offer'd *Burnt-offerings* on the *Altar*. But in those Ages *Jacob's Bethel* is the most remarkable: Because there upon his Journey to *Padan-aram* God appear'd to him in a *Dream*, and he was sensible of the *Vision*. For as soon as he awaked, he said, *Surely the Lord is in this Place, and I knew it not: How dread-*

dreadful is this Place? this is none other but the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven. From this Sense of this Revelation, he rose up immediately, and took the Stone that he had put for his Pillow, and set it up for a Pillar, and powdered Oyl upon the top of it, and said, This Stone which I have set up for a Pillar, shall be GOD's HOUSE, as we read, Gen. 28. 10. to the End. When he return'd again into his own Country (which was several Years after this first Divine Appearance) God appear'd to him a second time, Gen. 35. 1st. to the 8th. verse, and commanded him to go to Bethel, and build him an Altar, and dwell there. To which command Jacob and all the People that were with him, paid a ready Obedience. For Jacob went to that Place, and built there an Altar, and called the Place El-Bethel, because there God appeared unto him. Nay, Before this second Revelation, Jacob thought himself oblig'd to have a place set apart for the Public Worship of God. For when he came from Padan-aram, and was come to Shalem, a City of Shichem, which is in the Land of Canaan, he pitch'd his Tent before the City, and bought a parcel of a Field, where he had spread his Tent, at the hand of the Children of Hamor, Shechem's

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chem's Father, for an hundred pieces of Money. And he erected there an Altar, and called it, El-elohé-israel; Gen. 33. 18, 19, 20.

'Tis true, these Altars were unlike the Churches and Temples that were afterwards built in Honor to God. Yet these Altars were suitable to those times and to such Persons, as had no fixed Habitations, but dwelt in Tents. And they do however clearly shew the early Practice of having Places set apart for *Divine Worship*.

When the *Israelites* became a numerous People, and with an high hand and an out-stretched Arm were brought out of *Ægypt*, *Moses* was commanded to make a *Tabernacle* for the Public Worship of God; and God himself appointed both the whole Form, and the particular Materials of the same. This *Tabernacle* was to continue during the time of their being a travelling People. But when they were settled in the Land of *Canaan*, it was in *David's* Heart to build Him an *House of Cedar*. Howbeit the Lord accepted his *Intention*, but wou'd not permit him to act in pursuance of it, because he had *shed much Blood*. Yet at
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the same time he promis'd that his Son shou'd build him an House. And *Solomon* did accordingly build a *Temple* unto the Lord; a sumptuous Structure for Height, Greatness, Magnificence, and Ornament. But besides this *Temple* or *Cathedral*, at *Jerusalem*, there were a multitude of *Synagogues* or other places dedicated to God's Service, both in the City and other Parts of the Country, correspondent to our Parish Churches; and to these places of Public Worship the *Jews* did constantly and religiously resort.

CHRIST himself did not forsake these Assemblies, but went both to the *Synagogues* and *Temple*, and conform'd to their way of Worship. And whatever *Alterations* he made in the *Ceremonial Law*, or whatever perfection he gave to the *Moral Law*, the Practice of *Assembling together* in appointed Places was without interruption continued and confirm'd. Indeed in the Times of Persecution they had no settled Places, but were forc'd to meet as they cou'd. Yet when *God* took Vengeance of those bloody Princes, who wou'd neither call upon *God* themselves, nor permit those that wou'd, and rais'd *Kings* to be *Nursing Fathers*, and *Queens Nursing Mothers* to the
O Church;

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Church; then *Churches* were immediately erected with a great deal of Piety, Industry, and Expence; and ever since have been continued in all *Countries* where ever the *Gospel* has been preach'd.

Nay, at this very Day, whatever *Difference* there may be in various *Nations*, as to the *Object* and *Manner* of *Adoration*, there is a *General Agreement* for having *PLACES* set *APART* for Solemn and Public Worship. The *Turks* have their *Mosques*; the *Jews* their *Synagogues*; the *Heathens* their *Altars*; and, the *Christians* their *Churches*.

SECTION III.

In what Sense these Places are called the Houses of GOD.

NOW these *Places* are not called the *Houses of God*, by way of *Limitation* to the *DEITY*, as if the Presence of *God* was circumscrib'd and confin'd within a *Material Temple*. In this Sense *Solomon* upon his Dedication of the *Temple* at *Jerusalem* cou'd say, 2 *Chron.* 6. 18. —
Behold, Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens

vens cannot contain thee; how much less this House which I have built. And against such an absurd mistaken Notion St. Stephen argues very elegantly, *Acts 7. 47, 48, &c.* But Solomon built him an House. Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in Temples made with hands; As saith the Prophet, *Heaven is my Throne, and Earth is my Foot-stool: What House will ye build me? saith the Lord; or what is the Place of my Rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?* So that these Places consecrated for the Service of God, are not in this limited Sense called his Houses.

But these Places are call'd the Houses of God; in respect of their Sanctity, and in respect of the Peculiar Presence of God in these Holy Places.

First, They are call'd the Houses of God, in respect of their Sanctity.

To know what this Sanctity is, we must enquire into the various Notions of Holiness, and such an Inquiry will determine it. Now there is an *Inherent Holiness*, and there's a *Relative Holiness*. And Each of these Notions is to be apply'd according to the different Aptitude of

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Persons or Things, to which it is appropriated.

There is a Holiness, which is ascrib'd to God, *Angels*, and *Men*. And this is an Inherent Holiness. That is, there is something in these Beings, which in its own Nature is *really* and *properly* such, allowing only various Degrees thereof according to the different Beings. If *Holiness* be ascrib'd to God, it signifies the *Eternal Rectitude* of his Nature, which is infinitely perfect and pure. If to *Angels*, it supposes in them such a Capacity as to be able and willing to pay a free, cheerful, and universal Obedience to their *Maker's* Commands. If to Men, it is to be taken for *sincere Endeavors* to know God's Will and do it. And thus they are made partakers of an *Inherent Holiness*.

But when HOLINESS is ascrib'd to *Times* and *Places*, then it is a *Relative Holiness*. That is, these Times and Places are not *holy* in themselves, but stiled *holy* from the *Relation* they bear to some Being or some End, which is properly such. Thus the *Seventh* Day of the Week amongst the *Jews*, and the *First* Day of the Week amongst the *Christians*, are no more *holy* than any other Parts of Time,
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consider'd barely in themselves, without reference to any thing else: But as the *Former* was observ'd in Memory of the *Creation* of the World, and the *Latter* in Memory of the *Resurrection* of CHRIST, and *both* set apart for the more Solemn *Public Worship* of GOD; *they* are for these Reasons call'd *Relatively holy*. And thus there is *holy* Ground, and *Churches* are call'd *Holy Places*, and all the Utensils for the Decency of Divine Service are term'd so. Because they are all set apart and appointed for a *holy End*, and bear a Relation to GOD, who is infinitely *Holy*. Since these Places are thus chosen and thus sanctify'd, that GOD's Name only might be honor'd there, they are therefore call'd the *Houses of GOD*. And 'tis real *Prophaneness* to apply these Places to any other *use* but the Service of GOD. An Argument whereof may be drawn from the Example of our Savior, who, as mild as he was, knew when to be angry, and what wou'd justify it. And the Zeal he had for his *Father's* Honor, and the Sacredness of his *Father's* House, transported him with a more than ordinary Vehemence and Indignation against the unholy *Abusers* of the *Temple*. For, as the *Evangelists* relate this Action, *Jesus* went up to *Jerusalem*, and found in

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the Temple those that sold *Oxen*, and *Sheep*, and *Doves*, and the *Changers* of Money sitting: and when he had made a Scourge of small Cords, he drove them all out of the Temple, and the *Sheep* and *Oxen*; and pour'd out the *Changers* Money, and overthrew the Tables; and said unto them that sold *Doves*, *Take these things hence, make not my Father's House an House of Merchandise; Is it not written, My House shall be called of all Nations the House of Prayer? but ye have made it a Den of Thieves, Mark 11. 17. John 2. 13, 14, 15, 16.*

Secondly, Churches are call'd the Houses of God, in respect of the *Peculiar Presence* of God in these Holy Places.

If we consider the *Divine Presence* in general, we must believe GOD to be in *all* Places by his Power, Providence and Knowledge. And in this sence the Royal Prophet might well say, *Psal. 139. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I go then from thy presence? If I climb up into Heaven, thou art there; If I go down to Hell, thou art there also; If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the Sea, even there al-*

so shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me; If I say peradventure the darkness shall cover me, then shall my night be turn'd into day.

Yet there are various ways of God's displaying Himself more *peculiarly* in *different places*. As, in *Heaven* is God's more *Immediate* and *Glorious* Presence. In *Hell* he is *present* by his *Fury* and a just *Vengeance*. In *this World* he discovers himself by his eminent *Judgments* and *Mercies*. And in the *Church* we enjoy the *presence* of his *Grace* and *Favor*. That is his *House*, and there he will have us to visit him; and if we visit him in that place, he will there meet us, hear our *Prayers*, and grant us *Life* and *Blessing* for evermore. He accepted the *Sacrifices* that were offer'd, and the *Services* that were paid upon the *Altars*, in the first *Ages* of the *World*. And what he said of *Solomon's Temple*, by parity of *Reason*, may be apply'd to all other places of *Public Worship*. The *Testimony* he gave of that *Temple*, is in *2 Chron. 7. 15, 16*. *Now mine Eyes shall be open, and mine Ears attent unto the Prayer that is made in this place: For now have I chosen and sanctified this House, that my Name may be there for ever, and mine Eyes and*

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mine Heart shall be there perpetually. In pursuance of this Divine Testimony and Promise, Jehosopha upon an urgent occasion appears before GOD, saying, 2 Chron. 20. 9. If when Evil cometh upon us, as the Sword, Judgment, or Pestilence, or Famine, we stand before this House, and in thy presence (for thy Name is in this House) and cry unto thee in our Affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. So that well may the Church be call'd The House of GOD, since he has oblig'd us to come thither, and promis'd there to meet us, hear us, bless us, and forgive us.

S E C T. IV.

With what Dispositions and Qualifications we are to appear in these Houses of GOD.

THE Reason of this Inquiry is fetch'd from the various Dispositions of Men at various Times. Because as the *Temper of the Mind* is, such will be the *Effect* of the Prayers of the Church and the Word of GOD upon the Heart. 'Tis experienc'd, that upon saying the same Prayers and reading the same Chapters,

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ters, *we* have not the same Affections, nor *they* an equal Influence. Sometimes a melting Discourse will not affect the Soul, when at another time an indifferent one will pathetically move us. Whence shou'd this proceed, but, next under God, from the Use and Neglect of convenient Preparation.

Now this *Preparation* is to be employ'd in disposing and qualifying us for the Divine Presence in the Church. And what these *Dispositions* and *Qualifications* are, I shall lay down, and distinctly treat of under these three Heads. Such as respect God, such as respect the *Minister*, and such as respect *Our selves*.

First, What *Dispositions* and *Qualifications* are necessary with respect to God: And these are *Reverence* and *Faith*.

Whilst we are upon Earth, we cannot come more immediately into the presence of God, than by coming to the Church; for God is in this place. And if so, we ought to have an awful regard to this DIVINE MAJESTY, before whom we appear. The very Apprehensions of his Power, Wisdom, Justice and Goodness, are enough to compose our Spirits, to allay the Vanity of our Minds, and make
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us appear with Humility and Devotion, with a profound Reverence and filial Fear. And then shou'd an Unbeliever come into one of our Congregations, and observe this Silence, Seriousness, Piety and Composure, he wou'd affirm of a truth, *that God was amongst us*, and by our Behavior be provok'd to the like Service. But if we give Demonstrations of Indecency in our Behavior, if we sleep away our time, or whisper of other Matters, or come out of curiosity to criticise, as if the *Church* was a *Theater*, and the *Pulpit* a *Rostrum*, we do not carry our selves as becomes the Divine presence. And then shou'd an Unbeliever come into one of our Congregations, and observe this, wou'd he not say, we were mad, and ask, What God this People serves, who is so irreverent? So that whether we consider the *Dignity* of the Person, the *Importance* of the Duty, and the *Indecency* of the contrary Practise, we are oblig'd to appear before God in the Church, with the deepest *Reverence* and *Devotion*.

As *Reverence*, so *Faith*, is another Duty, with respect to God in the Church.

Now by *Faith*, in this place, I mean a firm *Perswasion* of the Mind, that what

is Actually express'd, and Virtually imply'd in Scripture, and clearly prov'd from thence is infallibly true. Because the Scriptures are the Word of that God, who cannot lie; who is infinite Truth, whose Knowledge renders him incapable of being deceiv'd Himself, and whose Goodness is too transcendent to deceive others. With this Temper, with this full Perswasion we are to come to Church. And we are readily to believe every part of Scripture History, every point of Doctrine, every Divine Precept, every direct Prohibition, every sublime Mystery, every precious Promise, and every severe Threatning there deliver'd. And then God will accept our Persons, hear our Prayers, and his Word will edify us. These are the *Duties* with respect to God. The next Consideration is,

Secondly, What Dispositions and Qualifications are necessary with respect to the Minister.

I might here lay down, that the *General Duties* which the People ow to their *Ministers*, are, *To esteem them very highly in Love for their Work's sake, 1 Thess. 5. 13.* To be very tender of their Characters; To regard their Advice when offer'd; To ask their Advice in doubtful Cases;

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Cases; To admit of, and promote Religious Conferences; To let them be truly their Guides to Salvation; To suffer no prejudices to arise from Temporal Concerns to hinder the Hearing and Efficacy of their Doctrines, and, to take care that their Legal Maintenance be duly paid; not only without *Fraud*, but with such punctual *Ease*, that they may not have a Temptation to be careful about many things, but entirely mind the one thing needful. But altho' these various Duties be plainly deliver'd in *Holy Scriptures*, yet the present Head confines me to consider the People's Duty towards the *Minister* in the *Church*, when he is performing the Offices of Public Worship. And these are, *Humility* and *Discretion*.

By *Humility* is meant, the not having too *high* an Opinion of our own Worth and Merits, nor too *low* an Opinion of our *Ministers Abilities*. For there is no *Clergy-man* so mean, but is able to tell us more than we do practise. And if once the Hearers become conceited, they will presently think themselves too *Knowing* to be instructed, and too *Good* to be reprov'd. The Wise, as well as Ignorant, may receive Benefit from a plain *Teacher*,
if

if they be not too proud to receive it. And 'tis a certain sign that a *Christian* do's not desire the *sincere Milk of the Word* to grow thereby, if he despises this *Food* of his Soul, because it is not dress'd up and recommended with all the Ornaments and Advantages of *Rhetoric*.

And then as for *Discretion*, the other part of the Duty with respect to the *Minister*; by that I mean, a true *Examination* of what is heard by Scripture Rules, and solid Reasonings. *Preaching* is certainly a very profitable and useful Exercise, where the Hearers are rightly disposed. Our *Savior* took this way of Exhorting, Reproving, and Instructing. And his *Apostles*, and all other Ages of the Church have follow'd it. And yet both our *Savior* and his *Apostles* requir'd and commended this Temper in their Auditors, tho' *they themselves* were Infalible in their *Doctrines*. CHRIST bids the *Jews* to *search the Scriptures*. *John* 5. 39. that they might observe what he said was agreeable to their own Prophets. St. *Paul* and *Silas* commended the *Bereans*, and said, *Acts* 17. 11. *They were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they receiv'd the Word with all readiness of Mind, and search'd the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.* Now

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Now if such an *Examination* was requir'd and commended upon the Preaching of CHRIST and his *Apostles*, how much more necessary is it with respect to the *Ministers* of this Age, who are liable to err, who want the Infallible Guidance of the Spirit of GOD, in that perfection which they had. No implicate Faith is requir'd to our Discourses. We desire our Hearers to believe no farther than they are convinc'd by *Reason* and *Scripture*.

Yet I must here add, that a particular Care ought to be taken not to be too *rash* and partial in Censures of this kind. And in many Cases, especially amongst the common People, it will be but reasonable, I think, to submit to the Judgment of their Guide. Because he has made it his particular Business and Study to instruct himself in these Matters for the Information of others. And as the *Priest's Lips*, *Mal. 2. 7.* shou'd keep Knowledge; so, as the Prophet there goes on, the People shou'd seek the Law at his Mouth; for he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts. Those who are not capable of making a right Judgment, are to follow the Advice of their Pastor. Those, who are

are able to judge, are to search the Scriptures, and try the Spirits, whether they are of God, and distinguish pernicious Errors from saving Truths. The next Head leads me to enquire,

Thirdly, What Dispositions and Qualifications are necessary with respect to Our selves. And these are, Attention and Holiness.

First, Attention, which is necessary both in Praying and Hearing. It is necessary in Praying; because without it we cannot joyn in the Prayers of the Church with the Minister; neither can we pray with the Spirit, except we pray with the Understanding. Attention is also necessary in Hearing; because had a Man the Soundness of a Sanderson, or the Smoothness of a Tillotson, or the Learning of a Stillingfleet, was he like an Angel for his Appearance or Oratory, for his Strength of Reason to convince, or his Power of Eloquence to perswade; without Attention his words wou'd be fruitless, and his Breath in vain. For what signifies the Meridian Sun, to one who is resolv'd to wink hard? Or what are all the Thunder-claps of Heaven to a Man in a Lethargy? Arguments

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ments propos'd to an inconsiderate Soul, are like Arrows shot against an Anvil, which will rebound without leaving the least Impression. 'Tis the Homage we owe to God we come to pay, and 'tis that we are to mind.

Secondly, As we are to come with *Attention*, so with *Holiness*. For, *Holiness becomes GOD's House for ever*. And therefore when we appear there, we are to appear with real Sorrow for our past Sins, and hearty *Resolutions* of better Obedience, and we are to use this Approach as a *means* for Reconciliation and Reformation. 'Tis the Advice of St. James, Chap. 4. 8. *Cleanse your hands, ye Sinners, and purify your hearts ye double-minded; and then draw nigh unto God, and God will draw nigh unto you*. David gave this Testimony of himself, *Psal. 66. 18. If I regard Iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me*. Solomon declares, *Prov. 15. 8. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight*. The blind Jew being restor'd to Sight, argu'd very closely against the Sanhedrin in the defence of his Savior, *John 9. 31. We know that God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God and doth his will, him he heareth*.

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There was an Error, *heretofore* too prevailing in the World, which was this; The thinking to please God by observing the bare external Circumstances of Divine Worship. And how far *now*, under the *Gospel*, *Christians* may be content with the bare observance of the outward Rites and Ceremonies of Religion, such as appearing at set times and places of Worship, and joining in Public Prayers and Praises, I leave to every Man's Conscience to determine. Most undoubtedly this was a prevailing Error under the *Law*: because in the *Old Testament* it is in several places condemn'd, and in the *New* our Savior reproves the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, for laying too much stress upon it: And if the same Error continues amongst some at this Day, I presume the Principle of such Persons to be this, They cannot be satisfy'd with the Principles of *Infidelity*, and this makes them resolve to come to *Church*, and do something to quiet their Consciences, at least for the present; and so delude themselves with the vain hope of obtaining the *Divine Favor* hereby, without leaving their Sins.

But let none of us deceive our selves

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this way. For the *Scriptures* do plainly tell us, that the Homage of one, who is habitually wicked, and resolves to continue such, *is an abomination unto the Lord*; Or, that the outward Worshipping of God with our Hands, Lips and Bodies, is highly odious in his Sight, except it be join'd with Repentance and Obedience. An *Outward Worship* is indeed absolutely necessary; but when it excludes or lessens an *Inward and Spiritual Service*, 'tis condemn'd and ineffectual. Instances hereof we find very frequent. For this *Samuel* reprov'd *Saul*, 1 Sam. 15. 22. and said, *Hath the Lord as great delight in Burnt-offerings and Sacrifices, as in obeying the Voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of Rams. Thinkest thou, saies God, Psal. 50. 13, &c. that I will eat Bulls flesh, or drink the blood of Goats? Offer unto GOD Thanksgivings, and pay thy Vows unto the most Highest, and call upon me in the time of trouble; so will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise me.* God himself appointed the *Jewish Times*, and *Seasons*, and *Sacrifices*; and yet when *Moral Obedience* was wanting, these *Observances* excited the Indignation of *Heaven*. As appears from that famous passage

sage in *Is. i. 11, 12, &c.* To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the Burnt-offerings of Rams, and the fat of fed Beasts; I delight not in the blood of Bullocks, or of Lambs, or of He-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath requir'd this at your hands to tread my Courts? Bring no more vain Oblations, Incense is an abomination unto me, the New-moons and Sabbaths, the calling of Assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn Meeting. Your New-moons and your appointed Feasts, my Soul hateth: they are a trouble to me, and I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you: yea when ye make many Prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. But wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek Judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow. And then tho' your Sins be as Scarlet, they shall be white as Snow; tho' they be red like Crimson, they shall be as wool: For the Mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. I will only mention one Instance more of this Nature, and that is in *Micah 6. 6, 7, 8.*

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Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow my self before the high God? Shall I come before him with Burnt-offerings, with Calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleas'd with thousands of Rams, or with tenthousands of Rivers of Oyl? Shall I give my First-born for my Transgression, the Fruit of my Body for the sin of my Soul? He hath shew'd thee, O Man, what is good. And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD.

Now what was thus condem'd in a Jew, is equally condemn'd in a Christian, where the Case is *Parallel*. And the Case is certainly *Parallel*, if a Christian satisfies his Conscience with the bare external *Ordinances of Worship*. If we come to the *Church*, and do not come with full *Resolutions* of leaving our Sins; if we come to the foot of the Altar, and do not stedfastly purpose to keep God's righteous Judgments, our Service will be lightly regarded by the Most High. For 'tis not our Appearing in the Church, 'tis not our Kneeling down before God, 'tis not running over a few Prayers, nor reading a Chapter, nor hearing a Sermon,

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mon, nor partaking of the LORD's Supper, that will atone for Treachery, for Pride, for Covetousness, for Drunkenness, for Revenge, or for Impurity. If we do every thing but what we shou'd do, that is, if we do every thing but reform our Lives, the *Lord* will not hear us. To reform our Lives, is the way to make *God* propitious to us, and our outward *Homage* acceptable and prevailing. Thus prepar'd let us go to the House of *God*, and then we shall escape the Imputation of doing evil, and offering the *Sacrifice of Fools*.

ESSAY VI.

OF

The LORD's Supper.

S E C T. I.

The Words of the Institution consider'd.

WE cannot have a clear View and perfect Apprehension of the true Nature of the *LORD's SUPPER*, without examining and comparing the parallel Places in the Holy Scriptures where it is particularly mentioned. And in order to state, and open, and determine the most *Material Differences*, which have been raised concerning this *Doctrinal Institution* of our Saviour, I think it necessary to begin with an Explanation of some of the Words, delivered by Christ himself, at the first *Institution* thereof, as they are set down, *Matt. 26. 26, 27, 28.* Because from our Sa-

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vior's saying there, *This is my Body, This is my Blood*; a corrupt and erroneous Doctrine has been formed, and our Adversaries in the Church of *Rome* do say, that he meant, *This is my Natural Body, This is my Natural Blood*. And then they infer, that if the Natural Body and Blood of *Christ* are in the Elements, the whole Substance of the Elements of Bread and Wine is chang'd into the Natural Body and Blood of *Christ*. And this Change is call'd by them *Transubstantiation*.

In Defence of this Doctrine the *Papists* do talk of *Fathers* and *Councils*; Names which make a great *Noise* in a vulgar Head. And yet our *Divines*, who have fought with them at this Weapon, have evidently shewn, how long it was before ever such a Doctrine was heard of in the Christian World; when it was first set on foot, and how it was carried on, in an Age over-run with *Ignorance* and *Superstition*.

But moreover. The Scriptures are the only Divine Revelations, whereby we must judge of a Doctrine to be from *God*. The *Bible*, not the *Church*, is the *Rule* of our *Faith*. And therefore, supposing the
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Ancient Fathers had really maintain'd this *Popish* Doctrine, in this Case we may and ought to reject it. Because it is so far from being contain'd in Scripture, that the Scripture is really against it. And there is all the Reason in the World to argue and interpret, that by the words of the Institution, *This is my Body, This is my Blood*, our *Savior* means no more, than this Bread signifies my Body, and this Wine signifies my Blood.

It was very usual with our Blessed *Savior* to carry a Figure in his Words. In St. *John* ch. 10. 9. and ch. 15. 1. he calls himself a *Vine*, and a *Door*. In St. *Matthew* ch. 5. 13. he calls his *Disciples* the *Salt* of the Earth, the *Light* of the World. And if we have but so much Candor left, as to interpret an Author's Meaning by his common way of speaking, we must suppose these Expressions, *This is my Body, This is my Blood*, to import only a Sensible Representation of his *Body* and *Blood*.

And indeed 'tis not possible to make *Sense* of our *Savior's* Words, if we take them *literally*. For 'tis not to be doubted, whether the Particle *this*, refers to the *Bread*, since the *Romanists* themselves assert,

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assert, that he means, this Bread is my Body. Now how was it possible for our Savior's Hand to hold his whole Body? How was it possible for our Savior to give himself *entirely* to every one of his *Disciples*, when they saw him continue in the same Posture and Place? This Doctrine is a Contradiction in Terms; because it supposes every divided and subdivided *part* to be the *whole*, and supposes also the same Body to be in different Places at the same Time, and in the same Respect. This Doctrine is a Contradiction to the Evidence of our Senses; our Touch, our View, our Taste, our Smell. And the Evidence of Sense, where the *Faculty*, *Medium* and *Object* are duly proportion'd, is always certain. What Man of clear Reason can ever admit a *Doctrine*, or *Proposition*, that comes attended with such intolerable Absurdities, flat Contradictions, direct Impossibilities?

But was it either in *Nature* possible, or in *Reason* not altogether so improbable, the Practice wou'd render *Christians* abominable and odious to the whole World. To live upon Humane Flesh, upon an Incarnate God, wou'd make us worse than *Cannibals*, and be a Banquet beyond the relish of *Thyestes*. Be-

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Besides: If we allow the *Apostles* to be endu'd only with common Sense, we can't imagine them to understand our *Savior's* Words in any other than a Figurative Sense. 'Tis hard to suppose such a Weakness in their Mind, as to believe they had swallow'd what they saw. Had they understood any *secret* Meaning in the Words of the *Institution*, what Questions may we suppose them to have started, to know the Sense of what he had spoken? Or if they had receiv'd the least Intimation, that he meant such a Change, as the Church of *Rome* delivers, what Inquiries wou'd they have made, to have known how these things cou'd be? In other Cases they were forward enough to ask; and their Silence in this proves, that it never enter'd into their Thoughts to take his Words in a *literal* Sense. Because, upon this Supposition, there was need of the utmost Inquiry, to be satisfy'd. And since no Inquiry was made, 'tis plain, they understood him as speaking in a Figurative Manner.

To these Arguments, I shall only add one more, *viz.* The *Occasional Time* of this *Institution*. Which will be a farther Proof, that our *Savior's* Words were to be taken as a *Memorial*, and that his *Disciples*

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sciples understood Him in this Sense. Now the Occasion was this.

Moses, their Great General and Law-giver, immediately before the Deliverance of the Children of *Israel*, had appointed every Family to kill a *Lamb*, whose Blood was to be sprinkled on the Door-posts of the Houses, wherein they did eat the Flesh. Because the Destroying *Angel*, that was to be sent out to kill the *First-born* of every Family in *Egypt*, at the sight of this Blood thus sprinkled, was to pass over the Houses that were so marked. And from this passing by, or over, the *Israelites*, the *Lamb* was call'd the *Pass-over*.

Now the *Jews* were requir'd to meet once every Year at *Jerusalem*, and to slay a *Lamb*, and eat it in Memory of this Deliverance of their Fathers out of *Egypt*. And when it was slain, they repeated the Words of *Moses*, and said, *This is the Lord's Pass-over*. Not that that *Lamb* was the very Sacrifice which was slain in *Egypt*; but that it was in memory of that Transaction, whereby the LORD delivered their Fore-fathers.

Our Blessed *Savior*, according to the Custom

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Custom of the *Jews*, was at the Celebration of this Feast. And when it was finished, he instituted a SUPPER of his own, to be for ever observ'd in his Church, in Memory of a *Greater Deliverance* than that of the *Israelites*, even a Deliverance from the Slavery and Guilt of Sin, and Eternal *Destruction* that was due to it.

This he do's by Taking and Breaking of Bread, which was to signify his broken *Body*; and by Blessing and Giving the Cup, which was to signify the effusion of his *Blood*. Both were to keep up the *Memory* of his Death, by which we obtain'd *Redemption*.

In his *Institution* he retain'd the same Form of Words in kind, which the *Jews* us'd in the *Pass-over*. For as they said, *This is the Lord's Pass-over*; so he said, *This is my Body, This is my Blood*. And as the *Disciples* knew that their words were only a Phrase of Commemoration: so they also understood our *Savior* in the same Sense. And the *Christian Eucharist* immediately following the Eating of the *Pass-over*, they presently apprehended, that the eating of the LORD'S SUPPER was not a real, but a commemorative Sacrifice. Accordingly
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they ask'd no manner of Questions about it. Which they wou'd certainly have done, had they thought, that he had glanc'd at any real and substantial Change in the Elements.

In short, Both Scripture, Reason, the Understanding of the *Apostles*, and the Evidence of Sense, do sufficiently prove, that our *Savior* by saying, *This is my Body, This is my Blood*, meant no more, than this Bread *signifies* my Body, and this Wine *signifies* my Blood. And both shall be *Symbols*, in Ages to come, of my Death, which must be shortly accomplish'd, to take away the Sins of the World. And in this Sense, I understand and take the Words of the *Institution*.

S E C T. II.

Conclusions drawn from the Institution.

THe first Conclusion is this; That the LORD'S SUPPER is in the most proper Sense a *Sacramental Rite*. And this I shall prove, by laying down in short the true Notion of a *Sacrament*; and, by applying this Notion to the particular *Sacrament* of the *Lord's Supper*.

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A *Sacrament* is an Institution of *Christ*; in which some Material thing is sanctified, by the use of some Form of Words, and in and by which *Federal Acts* of his Religion do pass on both sides. On ours, by Stipulations, Promises, Professions, or Vows. On God's, by his secret Favor and Assistances.

So that *Matter* is of the Essence of a *Sacrament*; because there must be an outward visible Sign to distinguish it from other Acts of *Worship*. There must be a *Form* of Words; because by this *Form* the Material Sign is appropriated at that time to a particular use. There must be something signified by this *sanctified Matter*: because 'tis an outward visible Sign of an Inward and Spiritual Grace. And Lastly, it must be *Instituted* by *CHRIST*; because 'tis a *Federal Act*, to which a Conveyance of Spiritual Blessings is conditionally promis'd, and these Blessings must come from *CHRIST* our Head.

Now according to this Notion, the *Lord's Supper* is properly a *Sacramental Rite*. For,

First, Here are *Material Signs*. For

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as *Water* is the outward visible Sign, apparent to our Eyes in *Baptism*; so *Bread* and *Wine* are the outward Representations in the Sacrament of the *Lord's Supper*. And as the former Element was us'd by the *Jews*, the *Apostles*, and the Primitive *Christians*, in the Sacrament of *Baptism*: so these outward Elements of *Bread* and *Wine* were the *Matter*, by which *CHRIST* intended, as by outward *Symbols*, to represent unto the World a continual Remembrance of his Death.

And they are *Symbols*, which, by the way, do express the peculiar Design of this *Institution*. For *Bread* being the general Food of our Bodies, do's very well represent the Food of our Souls. And *Wine* taken with Moderation, being a chearer of the Spirits, do's very well represent the Comforts and Joys, which are inwardly felt by such, as are meet partakers of so holy a Mystery.

Secondly, The *Lord's Supper* is most properly a *Sacrament*; because there is a certain *Form* of Words, by which these Elements of *Bread* and *Wine* are sanctified, and appropriated to this pious Use. For barely considered in their own Natures, they are common; but after *Consecration*,

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secration, they are so set apart, as not to be look'd upon as common Bread and Wine; tho' we will not, cannot say, there is any substantial Change: chang'd they are in their *Use*, but not in their *Natures*.

Our Blessed Savior us'd a *Form* of *Words*, when he first prepar'd it, and gave it to his *Disciples*. The whole Essential Form of *Christ's* Consecration is retain'd in the Liturgy of the Church of *England*. Which words, when pronounced by a lawful *Priest*, do make the *Consecration*.

Indeed there were other Ancient Forms us'd from the *Apostles* Days, both before and after the Consecration and Receiving. In correspondence to which, certain Forms of Prayer are compos'd by our Church, by way of Preparation of the Communicants, in administring the Holy Elements, blessing God for the Benefit, and praying for their success. Forms so full of Seriousness, Piety, Contrition, Faith, and Gratitude, as are sufficient to melt the Heart, and inflame the Love, of a sincere and well-dispos'd *Christian*.

Thirdly, The *Lord's Supper* is properly a Sacrament: because by this outward Action there is something *Inwardly signified*, and *Inwardly received*.

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That which is *inwardly signified*, and must be consider'd, and look'd upon with the Eye of *Faith*, is the *Body and Blood of Christ*. And the Form of the Action do's in lively Images represent his Death, commemorated therein. The Breaking of the *Bread*, is set to signify the many Breaches and Wounds, that were made in his Body upon the Cross for our Sins. And the Powing out of the *Wine*, do's clearly denote the real Effusion of his *Blood*, which ran from his gaping Wounds and pierced Side. 'Tis the Death of *Christ*, which is represented to the Mind by these outward visible Signs: For *as oft as we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we do shew forth the LORD's Death till he come, 1 Cor. 11. 26.*

As there is something inwardly signified, so there is something inwardly receiv'd. Even all the Benefits of his Death and Passion, the Pardon of Sins, and fresh Supplies of *Grace*. Whilst at the same time we must come with penitent Hearts, and new Resolutions of a better *Obedience*.

Fourthly, The *Lord's Supper* is properly Sacramental; because it was instituted by
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our *Savior*. For none but CHRIST can institute a Sacrament. Because none but CHRIST can forgive Sins, and distribute Grace. And that our *Savior* did institute this Sacrament is a needless point to prove, all parties being agreed in it.

The second Conclusion to be drawn from this *Institution* of our *Savior*, is, That *Christians* are oblig'd to receive this Sacramental Rite of the *Lord's Supper*.

First, Because it is *commanded by Christ*. For says our *Savior*, *Luke 22. 19. This do in Remembrance of me*. He was not willing, that his Death shou'd ever be forgot by his *Disciples*, but wou'd have all *Christians* to keep in Memory his Sufferings, until he shou'd come again in the end of the World to Judgment. And so out of Obedience to a positive Precept, it is our indispensable Duty to approach his *Holy Table*.

Especially if we reflect on the *Time* when this Precept was given. Which is a Circumstance sufficient to engage our Practice, and move our Hearts. There is amongst Men a peculiar Reverence paid to the Desires of a departing Friend. The last words of such a Person strike deep upon the Memory, and affect the

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Soul, and are observ'd with a mighty Care, and sometimes with Superstition. And shall we then forget the last Farewel of a dying *Savior*? It was the last Command he gave his *Disciples*, and in them all *Christians*, immediately before his *Crucifixion*, That they shou'd remember his then future *Passion*, in the way which he himself had prescrib'd. And it is the height of Disobedience to absent from, and slight this Ordinance of *Christ*.

Secondly, As out of *Obedience*, so out of *Gratitude*, the *Lord's Supper* ought to be observed. The Death of *Christ* was not so mean and despicable a thing as not to be had in everlasting Remembrance. The shedding of his Blood was for our Remission; *By his stripes we were heal'd*; he died to reconcile us to God, even the Father. And shall we be so ungrateful, as not to commemorate his Meritorious Passion? We had perish'd, eternally perish'd, if he had not expired on the Cross, and by that Sacrifice of his made an Atonement for the Sins of the whole World. And we cannot surely be so wretchedly stupid, as to forget so inestimable a Benefit. Is it nothing to us, what the *Jews* did unto the LORD of Life? Was it not for our sakes, and for our Salvation, that he

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he suffered under *Pontius Pilate*, and was crucified? And is it not a Duty to remember such a wonderful Instance of Divine Love? And since *Christ* himself has prescrib'd a way for the continual Remembrance of his own Death, it is the most contemptuous Affront of the highest Mercy to bury it in Oblivion. The *Lord's Supper* is to shew forth the LORD's Death, by *Symbolical Rites* and outward Representations. And certainly by all the Ties of Gratitude, and the obliging Returns of Love, we are strictly engag'd to its Observance.

Thirdly, Our own *Spiritual Interest*, as well as *Obedience* and *Gratitude*, obliges us frequently to Communicate. For there we become partakers of the Benefits of *Christ's* Death. Not that we had never receiv'd them before. For at our *Baptism* they were conferr'd upon us, and a worthy Communicant receives the same every time he partakes of the Consecrated Elements. Yet because of our frequent Relapses into Sin, and absolute Dependance on the Divine Aid, it is necessary we shou'd frequently come to the *Lord's Table*. We shall find it beneficial to our Souls upon these Accounts, as it is the Sealing the Pardon of our past Sins,

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as it raises within us a just *Hatred* of Sin for the future, and as it endues our Souls with a *New Principle* of a *Divine* and *Spiritual Life*.

First, It is beneficial to our Souls, as it is the *Sealing* the Pardon of our *Past Sins*.

I suppose there is none will say, that he has no occasion to ask for Pardon. Few, very few can alledge, they have liv'd so innocently since the last Communion, as not to need the Forgiveness even of wilful Sins. Therefore in case of precedent Falls into wilful Sins, tho' upon sincere Repentance and true Reformation, he is according to the Terms of the Covenant of Grace receiv'd into Favor; yet it is by this Sacrament that his Pardon is seal'd anew, and the Benefits of *Christ's* Death are ratified, exhibited, and confirm'd in this particular. In this God bears him Testimony, that he is reconcil'd. Not that there is such a real and propitiatory Sacrifice every Communion; as the *Papists* vainly imagine, *Christ* being only to suffer once: but that it is a Commemoration of that Sacrifice of Himself which he once made, to take away Sin, and was instituted to seal unto us a

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Remission of our Sins, which Remission was before purchas'd by the Merits of his *Death*.

And oh! How great's the Joy, how unspeakable the Felicity of such an Union, such a Reconciliation? Which none can tell, but he who feels, which nothing but the actual Joys of Heaven can equal or exceed. A *Christian* meeting the Divine Favor in this Holy EUCHARIST, need not much value whose Censure he meets, whose Displeasure he incurs. The Favorites of Princes fall infinitely short of that Honor and Happiness, that redounds to him. He that can triumph in the Pardon of his Sins, he that has made his Peace with *Heaven*, may live above the Frowns, or the Smiles of *Emperors*. So long as God is his Friend, what matters it who is his Foe.

Secondly, It is beneficial to our Souls, as it raises within us a just *Hatred* of Sin for the future. For the *Lord's Supper*, we know, was instituted for a continual Remembrance of the Death of *Christ*, and his Atoning Sacrifice for the Sins of the whole World. And nothing do's so solemnly, so sensibly set before us the *Crucifixion* of our *Savior* as this. And if so,

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no pious Soul can seriously consider and meditate on this, (as every one that comes to the *Lord's Supper* ought to do) and at the same time be in love with those Vices and Corruptions, which brought him to so much Shame and Punishment, to so ignominious and barbarous a Death. When the Scene of *Christ's* Passion is acted before us in lively Images to refresh our Memories, when the Breaking of the Bread puts us in mind of his tortured Body, and the Poring out of the Wine also, the Effusion of his Blood; can we be unconcern'd at Sin, at our Sins, the Cause of all his Sufferings, and think them worthy to be embrac'd and cherish'd? Certainly from such Reflections, a violent Indignation will be rais'd against it, and the Practisereally suspended for the future.

Thirdly, It is Beneficial, as it endues our Souls with a *New Principle* of a *Divine* and *Spiritual Life*.

No one, I imagine, will so much presume upon his own Strength, as to say, he is sufficient of himself to do what is required of him. And if he be not sufficient, 'tis necessary out of love to himself, and the Obligations he has to be good, that he frequently observe this Institution

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stitution of *Christ*. Because 'tis a *Means* of *Grace* appointed by our *Savior*; and by the regular performance of this Action, we shall be enabled to stand, and overcome our spiritual Enemies. And every *Christian* may affirm with joy, that this Sacrament is a Defence and Armor against deprav'd Nature, vicious Habits, and strong Temptations. And not only so, but that it fixes within him a New Spirit, by which he will grow and improve in Goodness. There our Corruptions are mortified, our Graces strengthen'd, our Hope confirmed, and sinful Lives amended. As our Bodies are refreshed by Natural Bread and Wine, so the Souls of the Faithful are strengthened by the Body and Blood of *Christ*.

Besides, by this Sacrament a *New Principle of Divine Life* is implanted in us, from that *Mystical Union* which it firmly establishes betwixt *Christ* and his *Church*. As our Natural, so our Spiritual Life, depends upon the preserving Power of God. If he withdraws his Influence, we sink into Dust, and our Bodies die. And if he be not united to our Souls, we want that Vivification, which is necessary to our Life in him. In the Body Natural 'tis demonstrable, that a Member continues firm and sound,
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so long as it is united to the Body, and made partaker of the Influences of the whole; but when a Member is either cut off or by some Disease depriv'd of those Spirits, which are convey'd to it by the Head and Heart, it suddenly becomes both putrified and dead. Even so is it in the Mystical Body of CHRIST, the Church. So long as we continue united to *Him* our Head, we are partakers of Grace, and all other *Spiritual strength* from our Union with *Him*; and thus are made Living Members of his Church.

Now in the Sacrament of the *Lord's Supper*, we are united to *Christ* our Head, not indeed by a Natural Union, but the Promise of *Christ*. Because he has said, he that receives these Elements, do's effectually receive his *Body* and *Blood*; and he will then nourish him with all Goodness. This Efficacious Union is so understood by our own Church, as being taught in her Office to the *Communion*, that, if we receive the Holy *Sacrament* with a true penitent Heart and lively Faith, we do *spiritually eat the Flesh of Christ and drink his Blood, we dwell in Christ and Christ in us, we are one with Christ and Christ with us*. And I have insisted on these several Spiritual Blessings attending the

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the *Lord's Supper*, to let us see, that we are oblig'd not only in point of *Obedience*, and in point of *Gratitude*, but in point of *Spiritual Interest*, to receive this Sacramental Rite.

The *Third Conclusion* I shall draw from the Consideration of this *Institution* of our SAVIOR, is, That we are oblig'd to Receive this Sacramental Rite with a *Holy Preparation*.

The *Efficacy* of this SACRAMENT undoubtedly depends upon the *Dispositions* of the *Receivers*. And as we come *worthy* or *unprepar'd*, it will be either *comfortable* or *prejudicial*. 'Tis the highest Mystery of *Christianity*, and we are to approach it with *Reverence*, tho' not with *Adoration*. 'Tis a Mystery that must be perform'd with *Seriousness*, tho' not with *Superstition*. 'Tis a holy Mystery, and must be receiv'd with clean Hands, and a pure Heart.

But the World generally runs into extremes. Men think they can never go far enough from *Superstition*, except they become really *Prophane*. There have been fatal Mistakes, even about Preparation for the *Lord's Supper*. Some from a *superstitious Fear* have imagined no *Preparation*

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paration sufficient to make them *worthy* of it in a Christian sense. And the Consequences of this *Error* have been, either wholly to *absent*, or to come with a *doubtful* Mind. Others from a Spirit of *Prophaneness* have thought the *least Preparation* sufficient to make them *worthy* of it. And the Consequences of this *Error* have brought them to receive, either *ignorantly* or *rashly*; neither considering their Spiritual Condition, nor discerning the LORD'S Body.

Now both these *Errors* must be carefully avoided. And I shall endeavor in this and some other parts of this *ESSAY*, to adjust the Matter between these two *Extremes*, that we may neither be *afraid* to come *at all*, nor *dare* to come without *convenient Preparation*. For I will shew, that it is in our Power, with the Grace of GOD, to come prepar'd, by laying before us what is necessary to qualify us as meet Partakers of the *Body and Blood* of CHRIST. I will comprise what I have to say in as few and clear Words as I can.

First, 'Tis necessary to examine ourselves, and see whether we *understand* the Nature of this *Sacrament*. For
no

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no Person ought to come whilst he is ignorant of what he is going to do. In Matters of any Consequence, Deliberation and Knowledge are requir'd; much more in this, where the Soul is so nearly concern'd, and an express Command is to be obey'd.

Therefore before we approach this *Holy Table*, we must seriously consider, that our Blessed *Savior*, the same Night in which he was betray'd, instituted this *Sacrament of Bread and Wine*, as an Emblem of his approaching Death; and that he commanded his *Disciples* to observe it constantly, as a Memorial of his *Passion*, and as a Means of *Grace*. After we have thus consider'd the *Command* of CHRIST, and the *Ends* of this *Command*, we must look at something farther, than what we discover with our Eyes. The outward visible Sign indeed is only Bread and Wine; but 'tis the *Body* and *Blood* of CHRIST, which we are to think on, when we receive the outward Elements. These are the Things represented by them; which, together with the spiritual and internal part of this *Sacrament*, must be the subjects of our *Meditation*, and treasur'd up in our *Memories*.

Such a *Knowledge* of the Nature and
Ends

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Ends of this *Institution* is so necessary a part of *Preparation*, that it is really a prophanation of the *Lord's Table* to come without it. And yet no one can say, that he is not able to understand this: because the *Matters* to be *known* are so *few* and those so *clear*, as only a wilful *Understanding* can be ignorant of. He, that thinks at all, may soon apprehend the Meaning of this *Institution*. And it is necessary that he shou'd think, because he must receive; and to receive without discerning, is grossly heinous.

We must therefore instruct our selves and others in our Families, who are to receive with us; and with an Air of Gravity talk of it with one another, when we sit down in our Houses. Let the Nature and Design of this *Sacrament*, the express Command there is for it, the Things signified by the Bread and Wine, and the many Blessings and Benefits that by the Promise of CHRIST attend it, be well and distinctly examin'd. And having thus inlighten'd our Minds with the *Knowledge* of these *Divine Truths*, we have the *First Qualification* requisite to make us *worthy Partakers* of this SACRAMENT.

Secondly, To the *Instruction* of our
Minds,

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Minds, we must add the *Examination* of our Lives.

I must confess this is the most difficult part of our Preparation: not because we are *unable* to perform it, but because we are *unwilling* to go about it. It may indeed be none of the easiest tasks for him, who has suffer'd his Accounts to run so long, that he knows not where to begin. But however this may be, 'tis certain, sooner or later, we must call our own ways to Remembrance, or be eternally Miserable. And especially before we come to the *Sacrament* of the *Body* and *Blood* of CHRIST, we are particularly oblig'd to search into our Consciences, and compare our *Actions* by the Rule of God's Word. And in whatever Instances we find our selves to have offended, we must bewail our own Vileness, and shew our selves Penitents. But having already consider'd this *Duty* of *Self-examination* by it self, I shall now refer my Reader to that *ESSAY*; earnestly desiring the serious perusal of it, as at all times, so most especially before every *Communion*.

Doubtless a good Life is the best Preparation, and he, that lives well, can put himself into readiness upon short Warning.

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ing. But since there is no Man living who sinneth not, upon this account 'tis our Duty to observe the Sins, of which we have been most heinously guilty, with all the *Aggravating* Circumstances thereof. And a humble Confession, and hearty Sorrow, and sincere Resolutions of Amendment, from such a view, are the *best Qualifications* in the World, and such religious Dispositions will give a Man comfort at this Feast. When a Person has a clear sense of the Nature and Number of his Sins, and is truly humbled for them, and groans under the Burthen of them, and is extremely Sorrowful for what he has done, and stedfastly purposes to forsake his Vices and lead a New Life, and comes to the SACRAMENT with a lively Faith, and firm Assurance of the Divine Mercy and Assistance; such a one, I say, may rest satisfied in his Mind, and need not give way to *Jealousies, Fears, and Doubts*; for he has put on the *Wedding-Garment*, and will be received as a *worthy Communicant*. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous Man his thoughts*, let Neighbors be reconcil'd to one another, and Contentions cease; then they may be well accepted, and reap Advantage.

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And I hope, no one will say, that this is not in his power; 'tis certainly in his power to be sorry for what he has done amiss, to resolve to do so no more, and be in Charity with all the World. This is what is required of him who comes to the SACRAMENT, and this every one may perform if he pleases: For thus our own Church has stated the Matter; *Ye, that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your Neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the Commandments of GOD, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways; draw near with Faith, and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees, and take this Holy Sacrament to your comfort.*

The Fourth Conclusion, I shall draw from this Institution, is, that it is absolutely requisite for all Christians to receive the SACRAMENT in both Kinds.

This is oppos'd to a dangerous Doctrine in the Church of Rome, whereby it is made necessary to Salvation, that the Sacrament shall be receiv'd by the People in one Kind only, and that the Cup be not administred to the Laity. Against

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which I argue thus from the *Institution* of CHRIST in the several *Evangelists* and from a passage in St. *Paul's* Epistles.

Our Adversaries do allow, that the Consecration of both Kinds is *Essential* to the *Sacrament*. Now if the *Consecration* be necessary, so is the *Reception*. Because there is the same Command for the *Reception*, as there is for the *Consecration*: and our Savior, who appointed both Kinds to be consecrated, appointed both Kinds to be received. Accordingly we find our Savior distributed both Kinds to his *Disciples*. For he said of the *Cup*, *Drink ye All of it, for this is my Blood*, as expressly as he said of the *Bread*, *Take and eat, this is my Body*. And St. *Mark* tells us, *Mark* 14. 23. that they did as he commanded, that — *they All drank of it*.

If it be acknowledg'd, that the *Minister* is oblig'd by the Words of the *Institution* to receive in both Kinds, but not the *People*; I have *Four Reasons* to urge, which may be of weight to overthrow this *Doctrine*.

First, That the Words of the *Institution* make no distinction between *Minister* and

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and *People*, but contain an *Universal* and *Unlimited Precept*. There is neither a *Command* that the *Minister only* shall receive in *both Kinds*, nor a *Prohibition* that the *People* shall *not* taste of the *Cup*, but both *Minister* and *People* are to be admitted to the *Reception* of both.

Nay, The *Bread* may as well be denied as the *Cup*, there being as much Reason for the one as the other. For if the *People* by the words of the *Institution* are oblig'd to receive the *Bread*; by the same Words they are oblig'd to receive the *Cup*, as well as the *Minister*. There is the same *Command* for the *Cup*, that there is for the *Bread*, and both may be denied as well as one, but justly neither. Against this Doctrine of *Half-communion*, I alledge,

Secondly, That *St. Paul*, in reforming the Abuses concerning the *Lord's Supper*, which were in the *Corinthian Church*, declares to the *Corinthians* in general, That, as they shou'd examine and prepare themselves to be meet partakers at the *LORD'S TABLE*; so they shou'd take Bread and eat it in remembrance of *Christ*, and also drink of the *Cup* in Remembrance of *Christ*. So far was this

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great *Apostle* from thinking that either of the Kinds shou'd be *denied*, that he affirms *Both* to be *receiv'd* in Memory of *Christ*. And he asserts, 1 *Cor.* 11. 23, 24, &c. That this is according to our *Savior's* own Institution. I farther add,

Thirdly, That the *Reason* for which our *Savior* commanded the *Apostles* to drink, obliges *All Christians* whatsoever to do the same. *Drink ye all of it*, says *Christ* in *St. Matthew*: and then he immediately gives the *Reason*, why they shou'd receive the *Cup*; *For this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for Many for the Remission of Sins*. Now we know, that *Christ's* Death was of Universal Extent, and that his *Blood* was a Ransom and Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World. And therefore as this Benefit belongs to the *People* as well as the *Priest*: so for the same Reason both the *People* and the *Priest* ought to be Partakers of the *Cup*, which will be effectual to the saving of All, who lead Lives suitable to their most *Holy Profession*. 'Tis an Act of *Impiety* against *God*, as well as an *Injury* to *Man*, to deny the *Laity* the *Cup* in the *SACRAMENT*.

Fourthly, I shall only say farther,
that

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that the *Benefits* of this *Sacrament* are annexed to *Both Kinds*, and not to *One* singly. Because the *Vertue* of the *Sacraments* do's not depend upon the Nature of the *outward sign*, but the *Institution* of *Christ*. Now if the *Vertue* of the *Sacrament* of the *Lord's Supper* depends upon the *Institution* of *Christ*, then where the *Institution* of *Christ* is not observ'd, the Consequent *Vertue* thereof cannot be expected or obtain'd: But the *Institution* of *Christ* is not observ'd, where *one part only* is receiv'd: and therefore to such an *Imperfect* Observance the Promis'd Blessings are not annexed. The whole *Precept* must be kept, if we wou'd reap the *Advantages* of it. Because the *Blessings* are promis'd to accompany the *whole Ordinance*, and not only the *Performanc e* of *Half* of it. So that we must drink of the *Cup* and eat of the *Bread*, in Conformity to *Christ's* Institution. And when we have done so, we may expect the Inward and Spiritual Part to attend the Outward Action. But without it, we do not observe the Order of our *Savior*: and what can be expected from such a Neglect, but a Denial of the Privileges and Benefits of the same.

And now to sum up what has been insisted

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on in the two foregoing *Sections*. Since the *Institution* of the LORD'S SUPPER is only a *Sacramental Commemoration* of the Death of CHRIST; since the Elements are not *transubstantiated* into the *Real Body* and *Blood* of CHRIST, but receiv'd by Faith as such; since it is necessary we shou'd observe this *Institution* of CHRIST out of *Obedience*, *Gratitude* and *Interest*; since we are oblig'd to observe it with a *Holy Preparation*; and since *both Kinds* are essential to the *Words* and *Design* of the *Institution*, I have clear'd the *Most Material Differences*, which have been rais'd concerning this *Doctrinal Institution* of our *Savior*. And I hope thro' the whole, the Nature of this *Sacrament* is open'd and truly stated.

S E C T. III.

The Dangerous Unworthiness of the Corinthians stated.

Mistaken Notions about the *Nature* and *Danger* of receiving the *Sacrament unworthily*, have, I believe, occasion'd many to keep from the *Communion*; and sent others thither with a doubtful Mind. And upon an Appeal made to the
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the Consciences of Men, I do not find any one Passage in the whole Scripture that has contributed more to the rise of such Mistakes, than that of St. *Paul's*, 1 *Cor.* 11. 29. concerning eating and drinking *Unworthily*, and concerning eating and drinking *Damnation* to our selves. So that I judge it may be of no little Service to Religion to set this Matter in as clear a Light as I possibly can, that the *Mistakes* and *Fears* of honest and well-disposed Minds may be rectified and removed.

Such a *Design* engages me to consider, the *State* of the *Corinthian* Church at the time of the *Apostle's* Writing, what that *Crime* was which they were guilty of at the Communion, and the Nature of that *Punishment*, which this Crime exposed them to.

First, The State of the *Corinthian* Church at the time of the *Apostle's* Writing.

The Design of all St. *Paul's* Epistles, was not so much to *found* Churches, as to *heal* the Differences, and rectify the Mistakes, and prevent the Corruptions, which did or might arise in those Places

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where the *Christian* Religion had been already received. And as the arising of *False Teachers*; the Propagation of *Heresies*; the Sowing of *Tares* amongst the *Wheat*; and the degenerate Compliances of *After-times*, were foretold by our *Savior*, and left for Warnings to his *Disciples* to avoid them: So the Church of *Corinth*, or the *Christians* throughout *Achaia*, were in many *Instances* fallen from the Faith and Concord of the *Gospel*; by Men arising from among themselves and speaking perverse things. This is very apparent from the many Passages scatter'd throughout this Epistle, where he condemns many Principles and Practices which he had heard, and believ'd to have unhappily prevail'd amongst them; and which were Demonstrations of their divided and corrupted state, and gave occasion to the springing up of Sects and Parties of various Denominations.

Amongst the many prevailing Corruptions and Divisions, there was a very fatal one, which concerned the Administration of the *Lord's Supper*; and was matter of considerable Scandal and Prophaneness. This was occasion'd by the gross Abuses of the *Christian Feasts of Charity*, observed at the same time when the *Communion*
was

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was to be receiv'd. And indeed without taking into Consideration the Nature of these *Feasts*, it will be impossible to understand the Scope and Design of the *Apostle*, or to discover what it truly was which St. *Paul* so highly condemn'd, and GOD so severely punish'd, in the *Corinthians*.

Now we must know, that *Christians* from the very beginning did justly look upon the *Sacrament* of the LORD'S SUPPER, as a *Commemoration* of the highest Testimony of our SAVIOR'S *Love*. And being determin'd by such an Argument as the *Apostle* uses, 1 *John* 4. 11. *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*, they did appoint Feasts of Love for Demonstrations of the same. A common Entertainment was made with the *Offerings* of the *Rich*, and did immediately go before the *Sacrament* in their *Assemblies*. At this *Meal* the *Poor* were feasted together with the *Rich*, and there all *Civil Distinctions* were laid aside, and they sat down in higher or lower Forms, as it happen'd, looking upon the *Poor* of this World to be *Rich* in *Faith*, and Brethren by the *Gospel*, and Fellow-heirs of the Promises of *Christ*. This, with some other indearing Signs,
made

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made it a wonder, a charming *Profelyting* wonder, amongst the *Heathens*, *See, how the Christians love one another!* And this leads me to determine,

Secondly, What that *Crime* was which the *Corinthians* were guilty of at the *Communion*.

As the best things in the World are capable of being greatly abused; so this *Laudable Practice* did so far degenerate from its original Design, even in the *Apostle's Days*, as to deserve a severe Reprehension and Chastisement. So early did the *Devil* shew his malicious Policy in perverting pious Uses, and particularly in making these Feasts to be matter of *contention* and *disorder*, which were begun for Demonstrations of exalted *Piety* and tokens of *Unity* with the Brethren in *Affections*, as well as *Faith*. Instead of coming to the *Christian Assemblies* upon these Occasions for the better, *St. Paul* declares, *v. 17*, these Church-meetings were very much *for the worse*. Instead of nourishing Love and universal Charity at these Entertainments amongst the Brethren, great Divisions *v. 18*. were raised, when they came together. Instead of *Feasting the Poor*, *v. 20*. in imitation

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tation of the Supper of their LORD, who, without Distinction, gave his Body and Blood *for* all upon the Cross, and *to* all in the *Sacrament*, they excluded the Poor from their Share and Relief at this common Table. The *Rich*, who sent much, *v. 21.* in eating fat down and took of his own Supper, and made no difference between this and an ordinary Meal at Home. And the *Poor*, who brought little, were only partakers of that little which they brought. From this Breach of Charity and Separation of Tables, it happen'd, the *Rich* were Luxurious, and the *Poor* Empty, *v. 21. One is hungry, another is drunken.* Upon the account of these Abuses the *Corinthians* are charg'd with sinning against the Body and Blood of CHRIST, with not discerning the *Lord's* Body, and eating and drinking, not only their own Supper, but the LORD's unworthily.

So that the Crime, of which they were accused, was, the Coming to the *Holy Communion* in an *Uncharitable* and *Luxurious Disorder*. And such a Temper of Body and Mind, must needs make them very highly unworthy of this *Christian* Institution, a Feast of *Love*, and a Feast of *Purity*. And altho' by being *drunken* may
not

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not be meant that excessive Degree of Sottishness which usually go's under that Name: Yet, taking it in the Lowest sense, it do's however imply a more Liberal drinking, than was convenient for that *Season*, which went before the *Christian Sacrament*. And that which falls next under our Consideration in this Inquiry, is,

Thirdly, The Nature of that *Punishment*, which this Crime exposed them to.

Altho' the Participation of the *Sacrament* in an irreverent and disorderly manner, is a high Prophanation of that Institution, and a very provoking Crime; and if not sincerely repented of, will bring us to eternal Ruin: Yet the word *καίμα*, which our Translators have rendred *damnation*, do's not properly signify (especially in this place) *eternal condemnation*: but it signifies some *temporal judgments*, which were inflicted upon the *Corinthians* for so great a Guilt. And then the Verse wou'd run thus: He, that eateth and drinketh *unworthily*, eateth and drinketh *Judgment* unto himself. And I think we are strongly induc'd thus to interpret the Punishment here denounc'd, when we consider what immediately befel that People upon

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upon that account. Now the *Apostle* expressly says in the following Verse, That *for this cause many were weak and sickly amongst you, and many sleep*: i. e. For this prophane *Irreverence* at the *Lord's Supper*, God had sent amongst them *Afflictions* and *Diseases*, of which some were already dead. And the close Connexion of this Verse, with the former, do's support, with abundance of Reason, this Construction of the Punishment.

Nay, This *Interpretation* may be farther defended and supported, from the *Direction* and *Advice* he gives to prevent this Punishment, and from what he adds, will follow upon observing this Direction. The *Direction* he gives is, *to judge our selves*; which is the same with *Self-examination* in the 28th Verse. And then he adds, *If we wou'd judge our selves, we shou'd not be judged*: i. e. We shou'd escape those Punishments which the prophane *Corinthians* had fallen into. So that *Judgment* here is the same with *Damnation* in the former Place. Now *St. Paul* gives a clear Exposition of what he means by *Judgment* in the following words; *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord*. And since *Damnation* is the same as *Judgment*, and *Judgment*

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ment is call'd here the *Chastisement* of the LORD; 'tis plain, that neither of them is to be interpreted *Eternal Condemnation*. Because the very Nature of Chastisement supposes Time for Repentance, and is a Discipline for Amendment: whereas *Eternal Damnation* is a state of Irreversible Doom; from thence there can be no Return, there is no possibility of an Escape. He, that is *chastened* of the Lord, may be induced to be sorry for what he has done amiss, and thro' this Tryal become a New-man, and be restor'd again to the Divine Favor: but he, who is *damm'd*, can find out no way to alleviate or remove his Misery, has no space left for repentance, tho' he shou'd seek it carefully with Tears.

By thus considering the state of the Primitive Times, as to their Feasts of Charity, and joining the *Apostle's* Arguments in this Chapter, it is evident even to Demonstration, what the Crime and the Punishment of the *Corinthians* was, in the Administration of the *Lord's Supper*. The Crime laid against them of eating and drinking *unworthily* was, the *Partaking* of the *Sacrament* in a very irreverent Manner, accompanied with a *Disordered Body* and *Mind*. And the eating and drinking
Dam-

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Damnation to themselves, was, the bringing down *Temporal Judgments* upon their Heads for this Contempt of theirs, for not discerning the Lord's Body; for making no Difference between a common Entertainment at Home and this *Christian Sacrament* in the Church.

S E C T. IV.

Our Fears and Conclusions from this Passage ill-grounded.

THe Question here to be determin'd is, Whether comparing *Our Case* with *that* of the *Corinthians*, our *Fears* of Danger, which are usually rais'd from the fore-going Text, be *just* and well-grounded. And the Progress I have already made in their particular Case, will enable me to give a clear and easy Solution to this Question, by proving that our usual Fears of Danger, drawn from hence, are not just nor well-grounded. For,

First, Our Crime is not, cannot be the same with this of the *Corinthians*. Because we have no such *Love Feasts* accompanied

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companying our *Communion*, as did attend upon theirs; and so we cannot be guilty of those Disorders and Unworthiness which were laid to their charge. The Practice of these Feasts of Charity, tho' almost as early as the *Lord's Supper* it self, and no doubt well design'd at the beginning, did in process of time rise to a considerable Expence, made way for Luxury, and were so ill employ'd, that, as a late

* *Bishop Patrick.* * Learned Prelate of our own observes, in *Justin Martyr's* Days, which was about 160 Years after *Christ*, they were entirely laid aside; and the Offerings of the *rich*, instead of making a Feast at that time for the *poor*, were disposed of in a common Bank, for the occasional Relief of poor and distressed Persons. So much of the affectionate *Piety* and *Intention* of those Times is retained in the Church of *England*, as to have, *Oblations* and *Offerings* at the *Communion*, universally I believe in great *Towns*; and to my Knowledge in several Country *Parishes*, and I heartily wish it was religiously observed in *All*. But, if the Restoring of *This* be more than can be expected, 'tis adviseable, that every one of us, upon every Opportunity of Receiving the SACRAMENT, wou'd set apart *something* to be dispos'd of privately,

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ly, to the indigent Members of *Christ*. And as the Observation of this Direction will be a grateful return for our *Savior's* Love to us, and he has declar'd his Acceptance of it as done to himself: so it will be an Imitation of that Rule of the *Apostle's*, 1 Cor. 16. 1, 2. *Now concerning the collection for the Saints, as I have given orders to the Churches of Galatia, even so do ye; Upon the first day of the Week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prosper'd him.*

But however this be, 'tis undeniably plain, that we have not even the same Temptations to those Disorders, which the *Corinthians* had. So far from this, that it is our constant Practice, except in urgent cases of absolute Infirmary, to receive the *Sacrament Fasting*. And I am apt to imagine, the Custom of receiving the *Sacrament* fasting did originally arise from a Sense and Abhorrence of these Abuses. If indeed we despised the Poor, and came actually drunk to the *Communion*, our case wou'd in substance be parallel with theirs. But I am willing to hope, the worst of Sinners, how wickedly soever inclin'd at other times, do come to the Altar with some reverent Thoughts, and Religious Dispositions. There are few

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so prophane, as to come immediately from a Riotous Debauch to the *Lord's Table*: and in case there shou'd happen to be any Offenders of this or the like kind, the Church has lodged a Power in the *Minister*, for the avoiding of Scandal, and removing Offence from the Congregation, to rebuke them, and send them empty away. And since our Crime of eating and drinking Unworthily, is not the same with this of the *Corinthians*, our usual Fears drawn from this Text cannot be just nor well-grounded. But,

Secondly, Our usual Fears drawn from this Text, are not just nor well-grounded; because the *Danger* is not such, as some are apt to take it. For we are ready to interpret the *Apostle* speaking of eating and Drinking *Damnation*, to mean *Eternal Condemnation*; whereas he directly means only *Temporal Judgments*. And if Temporal Judgments were only the immediate Consequences that befel the *Corinthians* for their prophane and disorderly Irreverence at the *Sacrament*; if Time and Opportunity was still joyn'd to these Chastisements to prevent Eternal Ruin, much less Reason have any of us to suppose *Damnation* in the highest Sense, and exclusive of the Benefit of *Repentance*,

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penitance, to be the unavoidable Consequence of our Unworthiness at the *Lord's Table*, since our Unworthiness is not of so deep a Die as *Theirs*.

I am sensible some unwary *Christians*, even out of a sense of pious and conscientious *Fear*, upon reading these words of *St. Paul*, have lodged in their own Minds and the Minds of others these Conclusions; That the Receiving of the *Sacrament* unworthily is *certain* Damnation, without the possibility of Remedy or Escape; or, that the falling into Sin after the *Sacrament*, is absolutely *unpardonable*; Or, however, that since the Danger of Receiving is so great, it is best *not* to receive at all. These have been some of the unhappy Conclusions that have been drawn from the *Apostle's* Expressions. But the Conclusions are as weak and false in themselves, as they are pernicious and destructive to the Souls of Men.

The first of these *Conclusions* is, That the Receiving of the *Sacrament* unworthily is *certain* Damnation, without the possibility of Remedy or escape. Because *St. Paul* saies, *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself*. But what a weak and false Conclusion this is, is very easy to evince. For to cut the Answer as short

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as possible, I will for once suppose that by the threatn'd Damnation is meant the Damnation of *Hell*, which is more than the *Apostle* intends, and I need grant. Yet even with this Supposition I do not see any Reason at all, why this Sin, tho' confessedly very heinous, shou'd without any Warrant from Scripture be excluded from the *Gospel Mercy*, and the Privilege of Repentance, more than any other Crime of a provoking Nature. Against other Crimes there are Threatnings as severe and expresse, as is here denounced against this. For thus we read, *Mark 16. 16. He, that believeth not, shall be damned.* And *Ephes. 5. 5. 1 Cor. 6. 10. No whoremonger, nor unclean Person, nor covetous Man, who is an Idolater, nor Thieves, nor Drunkards, nor Revilers, nor Extortioners, hath any Inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God: Rev. 21. 8. The Fearful and Unbelieving, and the Abominable, and Murderers, and Whoremongers, and Sorcerers, and Idolaters, and all Liars, shall have their part in the Lake which burneth with Fire and Brimstone, which is the second Death: Psal. 9. 17. The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the People that forget God.* And to name no more, *John 5. 29. They that have done evil, shall come forth unto the*

the Resurrection of Damnation. Now since no more is threatn'd to the Unworthy *Receivers* of the *Sacrament*, than is threatn'd to several other Crimes, either *all* of those Sins must be excluded the Benefit of Repentance, or *none* of them. But 'tis the great Mercy of the *Gospel Covenant* to leave room for Repentance: and if an Infidel turns Believer, and the Drunkard becomes Sober, and the Lascivious Man Chaste, and any wicked Man reforms his Life, there is Joy in Heaven upon his Conversion; and God is reconcil'd unto him, and hath blotted out all his Transgressions, and his Sins and Iniquities he will remember no more. And certainly the same room for second Thoughts shou'd be left for the Unworthy Receivers at the *Lord's Table*, and a sincere and particular Repentance will be accepted of by God in this case, as well as any other. The unworthy receiving of the *Sacrament* is truly a very great Sin; and he, that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh his own Damnation, i.e. He, who is guilty of it, is in a state of Damnation. And so is every other Sinner in a state of Damnation, so long as he continues in an impenitent state. But Confession, Sorrow and Reformation, are undoubtedly

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effectual for the Pardon of all; except there was some other Text, besides this mistaken Passage of *St. Paul*, where the Prophanation of the *Lord's Table* is plainly shut out from all Hopes of Forgiveness. Whereas if we search from one end of the *New Testament* to the other, no such Passage can be found, and therefore no such Fears ought to be encourag'd. For admit the unworthy Prophanation of the *Body* and *Blood* of *CHRIST*, to be one of the highest Crimes a *Christian* is capable of falling into; (as without all question it is) yet since our *Savior* has declar'd, *Matt. 12 3. All manner of sin and blasphemy, except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, shall, upon Repentance be forgiven unto Men;* and since the Prophanation of the *Lord's Table* is not this Blasphemy against the *Holy Ghost*, and no one, I think, is capable of committing it in this our Age, we need not give way to Scruples, but turn our selves from all our Transgressions with full Assurance, that then *Iniquity* of what kind soever, *shall not prove our Ruin.*

The *Second Conclusion* drawn by Unwary, tho' conscientious *Christians*, from these Words of *St. Paul*, is, That
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the falling into Sin *after* the *Sacrament*, is absolutely *Unpardonable*. And from this Apprehension, several have been deterr'd from coming to the *Sacrament*. But this erroneous Principle being of so near a-kin to the former; the Answer there given, is a sufficient Confutation of it. For, if all manner of Sin upon Repentance shall be forgiven unto Men, then the Sins after the *Sacrament* cannot be absolutely unpardonable. Indeed to sin deliberately after so solemn an Engagement, is an high Aggravation of Guilt; but not of so deep a Die, as to be incapable of Forgiveness.

To what has been already urg'd, I shall only farther add, That this state is not a state of unsinning perfection; and that the *Lord's Supper* is a Means of Grace for the keeping us innocent in the Christian sense of sincerity, and renewing us again to a *Covenant of Mercy* upon our breaking our Engagements. So that it supposes our *falling* into Sin, and is appointed for our *Recovery*. We know the Primitive *Christians* communicated at the least every *Lord's Day*. And can we imagine they never fell into Sin, after they had first receiv'd. Undoubtedly they did; but far be it from us to judge they were

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all of them damned: and let not the Imaginations of our own Hearts be filled with Fears of the like Nature, with respect to our selves. *If we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the Propitiation for our sins.* We must walk with circumspection, after we have been at the *Lord's Table, and watch and pray against Temptations:* But if we sin, we are in a capacity of being renew'd again unto Repentance, and God upon our hearty Humiliation, and use of proper Means, will raise us when we are fall'n, and strengthen us after we are risen; *will lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and give us the comfort of his help again, and establish us with his free Spirit.*

But shou'd this sort of *Christians* be satisfied, that the unworthy receiving of the *Sacrament* is not certain Damnation, without the possibility of Remedy or Escape; and that the Falling into Sin after the worthy receiving of the *Sacrament*, is not absolutely unpardonable; yet there is

A *Third Conclusion* drawn by them from these words of *St. Paul*, the more *destructive* to the Souls of Men; because the more *prevailing* in the World, and that
is,

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is, That however, since there is a great danger in receiving, it is the best and safest course *not* to receive at all. But the Answer to this Principle shall be introduc'd, and given with all imaginable clearness in the two following *Sections*.

S E C T. V.

The Nature and Danger of our Unworthiness consider'd.

I Am here engag'd to state and clear these two Points. In what *sense*, or *when* we may be said to be Unworthy Partakers at the *Lord's Table*. And what will be the *Danger* of such an Unworthiness.

There is a twofold sense of *Unworthiness*. An Unworthiness for want of *Merit*, and an Unworthiness for want of *Disposition*. Either Men do not deserve the Favor they are partakers of, or they are not rightly qualified for it.

Now every one of us do eat and drink unworthily in the first Notion of Unworthiness: Because none of us, in strict propriety

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priety of Speech, *deserve* the Mercies there offer'd and convey'd to our Souls. The Sins and Infirmities of our most innocent state are so many and aggravating, that we must be forc'd to clap our Hands upon our Mouths, and hide our Faces in the Dust, and cannot challenge Pardon, and Peace, and the Assistances of the *Holy Spirit* at the Hands of God.

But that is the blameable Unworthiness in us, when we are not so rightly *qualified* for it as CHRIST requires, and we are capable of. Because here the Fault lies, not in our own *Natures*, but *Wills*; in the want of Endeavors, and not want of Power. If we will not put on the *Wedding-garment* when it is prepared for us, and laid before us; if we have no stedfast Belief in our Minds of what our *Savior* has promised, nor any grateful Love in our Hearts for what he has suffer'd; if Malice and Hatred reigns in our Souls, and we are resolved still to pursue our Vices and go on in the ways of Sin; if we do not truly and earnestly repent us of our Faults, and confess our Errors, and purpose to lead a new Life, we are certainly unworthy to appear before the LORD; as in other Acts of Worship, so in the great and solemn Duty of the *Communion*.
These

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These Indispositions are indeed real Affronts, and do betray the little sense we have entertain'd of the Cause of our *Savior's* Sufferings, and the Ends of this holy Institution. Thus qualified, we are truly unworthy to be partakers of the Body and Blood of CHRIST.

But whose fault is it, when we are thus unworthy? Is it not thro' our own Neglect and Wickedness? If we will, we may come prepar'd to the *Sacrament*. If we will not prepare our selves when we may, Sin and Danger lieth at our doors; and we shall inherit a Curse instead of a Blessing, whether we come to the *Sacrament* or not.

If we do come to the *Lord's Table* with this Unworthiness, we may, 'tis true, take, and eat, and drink the outward Elements; but the inward part or things signified shall indeed be wanting. The whole Action shall be so far from availing us any thing, that our pretended Obedience will be turn'd into Sin. God knows the secrets of our Hearts, and tries and discerns our Spirits, and perceives with what Affections and Intentions we approach. And when God views the Rottenness and Corruption of our Hearts, and the Depravity

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pravity of our Wills; how sinful we have been, and how resolv'd we are to continue so; that we are in love with *Death*, and in league with *Hell* and *Destruction*; when God observes all this in us, he will no more dwell with us than we with him; we cannot be one with *Christ*, nor *Christ* with us: *Then we are guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ our Savior; we eat and drink our own Damnation, not discerning the Lord's Body; we kindle God's wrath against us, we provoke him to plague us with divers Diseases, and sundry kinds of Death.* And except a particular Repentance be made for this Sin of Unworthy Receiving, we shall not only deprive our Souls of spiritual Nourishment, and expose our Bodies to Temporal Judgments, but bring both Body and Soul to eternal Destruction. These are pregnant Dangers, and big with innumerable Mischiefs, and the very thoughts of them shou'd keep us from presuming to eat and drink unworthily. We see the Sin, we behold the Danger of coming unprepared to the SACRAMENT; and this shou'd fill us with a holy Dread, and pious Preparation.

And yet if we do not come to the SACRAMENT, because we will not dispose ourselves

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selves for it; as our Absence will by no means excuse our Iniquity, so by our Absence we shall not be able to avoid the Danger. And this falls next under our Consideration.

S E C T. VI.

The Apprehension of this Danger no safe Excuse for Absence.

ALtho' by not going to the SACRAMENT we certainly avoid the Sin of unworthy Receiving, yet 'tis a miserable Delusion, if we think our selves in a safe Condition by staying away. For,

First, By staying away, we live in a wilful Violation and Neglect of a positive Command of our Blessed Savior. And 'tis a very great sin never to come to the Celebration of the *Lord's Supper*, as well as to come unprepared. Both are very dangerous, and ought to be avoided. And I cannot see what reason we have to imagine our selves more secure in the *total* Neglect, than in the *undue* Performance of our LORD'S Commands. The Crime of not doing what
CHRIST

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CHRIST requires, must at least be as heinous in its Nature, and as displeasing to CHRIST, as the not performing it in such a manner as we ought. But,

Secondly, The Reason of our Unworthiness and Absence, do's farther aggravate the Guilt and Danger of staying away upon the account of Danger. We stay away, because we are unworthy; and we are unworthy, because we are wicked, and unwilling to leave our Wickedness. But will the wilful Commission of any Sin be sufficient to excuse the wilful Omission of any Duty? Or, is there no danger in continuing in Sin, so long as we do but keep from the *Lord's Supper*? If a Rebel shou'd refuse the gracious offer of a *Pardon* from his Prince, because he was resolv'd to continue a Rebel, and so was unworthy of it; wou'd not this excite the Displeasure of his Sovereign, and hasten as well as aggravate his Condemnation? Why this is the very case of the unworthy Absenters from the SACRAMENT, who from the reason of their Unworthiness run upon certain Damnation to avoid the Danger of being damned. For they wou'd not be unworthy, if they were desirous to reform their wicked lives: and if they wilfully continue in sin, they are undoubtedly

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tedly in a state of Damnation, whether they come to the COMMUNION or not. He that lives in a continued course of Adultery, Malice, Drunkenness, Blasphemy, or any other grievous Crime, cannot possibly be in a safe condition, will certainly be excluded from the Kingdom of *Heaven*. For these sins are damnable in their own Natures, as being expressly forbidden by God, and do not receive their Malignity from the Prophanation of the *Lord's Table*. Indeed the Prophanation of the *Lord's Table* added to these other dangerous Crimes, will prove an Increase of Guilt. And so will the Guilt be increased by the sin of not receiving at all. And in this respect the case will neither be alter'd nor unequal.

So that since the total *absenting* from the *Lord's Supper* is a very heinous sin in it self, and since other sins are in their own Natures very destructive to our Souls without it, and since our Guilt is at least increased as much by not receiving at all, as by receiving unworthily, the Unworthy Non-Communicant neither escapes any Danger, nor puts himself into a safer Condition by his Absence.

Thirdly, Besides the sin of staying away,

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way, of staying away upon the account of a sinful Unworthiness; the mock Pretences of doing all this out of *Reverence* and Fear, are additional Aggravations of such a Person's Guilt. He pretends, he durst not approach the *Lord's Table*, out of the great Respect he has for the *Sacrament*, and out of a Religious Fear and Dread of offending. And whether this Pretence be real or feign'd, or something worse, a few words will enable us to determine.

As to that *Reverence* pretended to be paid to the *Sacrament*, by never coming to it, I cannot better illustrate the Matter, than by proposing a Parallel Case of the like Nature, amongst our selves. Suppose a Noble-man shou'd call his Servant to attend his Person, and appoint him to perform a particular piece of service; and if that Servant, who knew his Lord's Will, instead of doing it, shou'd stand at a distance and put him off, saying, Oh Sir, you are so honorable a Gentleman, and so excellent a Person, that I durst not come near you, nor am worthy to regard you: I ask the question, whether this Servant's complimenting away his Duty, and with a few fine Speeches, living in Disobedience to his Lord's Commands, would

wou'd be well accepted of by his Lord, or by any Master upon Earth in the like case. Just thus do's he deal with our Blessed *Lord*, who out of respect staies from the *Sacrament*. For our *Lord* and *Master* commands our Attendance there, and Disobedience is a strange way of shewing Reverence to a Person. We find our *Savior* insisting upon Obedience as a Demonstration of the Love of his *Disciples* to him. And we cannot be said truly to respect any one, whose Service we slight, whose Authority we despise, and when we do not regard any thing that he saies. If this be a Testimony of Respect, then I will venture to affirm, it is of such a kind as no Man can approve.

And as to that other Pretence of not coming to the *Sacrament*, out of a Religious *Fear* and *Dread* of offending, if the Pretence was real, one might justly wonder, how it comes to pass, that he shou'd be so much afraid of our *Lord's* Anger, by not performing his Commands as he ought, and not be afraid of our *Lord's* Anger, by not performing them at all. Did his Fear arise from a true Principle of Conscience, the Influence and Extent of it wou'd be the same in both Cases; the Reason being as just for the one, as the other. And moreover; 'Tis unaccountably strange, that such a Per-
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son shou'd be afraid of doing what *Christ* has commanded, and not be afraid of doing what *Christ* has forbidden. He can perhaps live in the known sins of Adultery, Intemperance, Injustice, Worldly-mindedness, Impiety, or several other gross Iniquities, without being concern'd; without any degrees of scrupulous Dread: But when he is called upon to come to the *Lord's Table*, he pretends Fear and Unworthiness, as an Excuse for his Absence. All this is Insincerity and Sham, a grand piece of improv'd *Hypocrisy*; and shews the great Danger of not coming to the SACRAMENT, out of the false and wicked Pretences of *Reverence* and *Fear*.

Fourthly, So far am I from believing any *Christian* to be in a safe condition by abstaining from the SACRAMENT, that I am inclinable to think the worst of *Christians* runs a greater Danger by staying away. For 'tis neither a Habit of sin at present, nor the Fear of falling into sin afterwards, (tho' these are the frequent, and indeed the strongest alledgments possible to be made) that can be any warrantable or secure Reason for absenting. Not the Habit of Sin at present: For there are two invincible Reasons even for an accustomed Sinner to come. As, first, Where shall his Soul be washed pure and clean, except in that Fountain of *Blood*, which was open'd
for

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for Sin and for Uncleanness? Do's he not stand in need of Mercy? And are not the Gates of Mercy there open'd, and Pardon and Peace distributed freely? Do's not our *Savior* invite, saying, *Come unto me ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you?* Hath not St. Paul assur'd us, that *Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners?* Is it not told us by St. John, *That if we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the Propitiation for our sins?* And why, after all these comfortable Invitations, shou'd any one think himself too great a Sinner to come; since the greater Sinner he is, the more occasion he has to come, and the greater Sinner he *thinks* himself, still the better qualified, the Divine Presence and Favor. The more wicked Life he has lead, the more welcome guest he will be at his *Lord's Table*, provided he do's repent; and if he will not repent, he proclaims open Rebellion against *Heaven*; his Guilt is undoubtedly increased, and his Damnation the more insur'd, tho he shuns the *Communion* with abundance of Care and Caution. And this Danger arises, not from his having been a very accustomed, and provoking Sinner, but from a Resolution to continue such a Sinner. Again; *Secondly*, An accustomed Sinner ought rather to come,

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than stay away: because before he comes, and when he is there, his Mind will be taken up with some serious Thoughts, some religious Meditations, some holy Resolutions. So much Reverence I believe the worst of Sinners paies to the Commemoration of our *Savior's* Death, and the Communion of the *Body* and *Blood* of CHRIST, as never to participate without owning their Crimes; without confessing their Guilt; without some degrees of Sorrow for having been wicked, without some kind of purposes of Amendment of Life. And tho' we shou'd suppose these good *Moods* to be but of a short Duration; yet even this Rigteousness, which is but for a little time, is certainly better than none at all. Tho' the Repentance he profess'd shou'd be as it were repented of; tho' the check he gave to his Lusts shou'd be again broken thro', and he be found rushing into his former course, as the *Horse rusheth into the Bat-tel*: yet these Interruptions of Wickedness, how short soever, to be sure are better than a continued course of sin.

And as the Habit of Sin at present is no warrantable nor secure Reason for absenting from the *Sacrament*; so neither is the Fear of *falling* into Sin afterwards any reasonable Excuse for the same Neglect. For if he complains of his being

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in the Gall of bitterness and in the Bond of Iniquity, if he fears the slavish Dominion of his Lusts and Appetites to be so strong, that he shall not be able to perform what he promises, this *Distrust* of his own Sufficiency, is an *Obligation* and *Qualification* rather for coming, than staying away. Because by coming to the *Sacrament*, we come to one of the Best *Remedies* against this slavish Dominion; we come to a Means of Grace appointed by our *Savior*, where our Pardon is not only sealed, but our Corruptions also weaken'd: and our Fears of not performing what we there promise, provided they be sincere, will be a considerable Inducement upon God to remove our Fears, by affording us Supports suitable to our Necessities and Desires. Whereas by staying away, we neglect our Cure, and keep from the Spiritual *Physician*; and in such a case 'tis unreasonable to complain we are not healed, we are yet under the captivity of *Satan*. And if because a Man is bad, he will not use the Means of becoming better; as he deserves no pity, so having no Restraint, he has reason to fear his Soul will be shackled faster in the chains of sin, and his bad condition be changed into a worse.

Let then an accustomed Sinner, mov'd with a willing Desire to repent, come to

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the *Lord's Table*, as well qualified as one in his circumstances can be expected. For there he is to be eased in his Burthen and unloosed from his Iniquity. And tho' he shou'd not find an immediate cure, tho' it shou'd be delay'd for some-time, yet let him not desist from his Preparation, and frequently coming to his LORD. For allowing Time and Patience proportionable to the contracted Habits, he will certainly find the Guilt of his Relapses to be lessen'd, and the Power of his Lusts abated, his *Graces* strengthen'd, his *Hope* confirm'd, and his *sinful Life* amended. But 'tis really tempting of *Providence* to expect to be reliev'd by a *Miracle*, in *Spiritual*, as well as *Temporal Wants*. Indeed the Manner of conveyance of *Grace* by the SACRAMENT, are beyond our Comprehension, and for that Reason ought not to fall within our Censure. 'Tis enough for CHRIST to promise, and us to believe: 'tis enough for Him to prescribe the *Means*, and us to use them.

These Pleas and Cases I have examin'd and determin'd, not to encourage the Want of Preparation for so Holy a Mystery, but to discourage the Neglect of observing so strict a Command. For as on the one hand I wou'd have every one fit and adorn his Soul as well as he possibly

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sibly can, before he presumes to come; so on the other hand I wou'd have no one dare to stay away upon vain Pretences or insincere Scruples; much less make the Danger of unworthy Receiving a Reason never to come at all. An Inference as weak as it is wicked, and such a Conclusion as St. *Paul* never hinted at in the least, when he treated of the Case of the *Corinthians*.

The *best* and *safest* use of this Sense of Danger, is, to engage us to come worthy and prepared. And this Observation is agreeable to the Scope and Design of the *Apostle* in this Chapter, where he advises them to *examine themselves, and so to eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup, and to judge themselves, that they might not be judged of the Lord, nor condemned with the World; and to tarry one for another, when they come together to eat at their Feasts of Charity*. After he had insisted on the Unworthiness of *the Corinthians*, and the Danger they incurr'd; after he had declared, *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, is guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ, eateth and drinketh his own damnation, not discerning the Lord's Body*: he do's not advise them, therefore be sure you neither eat nor drink at all. He was sensible, there was at least as great, or greater Danger in such a Neglect. Instead

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then of such a Caution, which wicked and weak *Christians* wrest to their own Destruction, he exhorts to a serious Preparation for it; that so every one may, in a *Christian* Sense come worthily to the LORD'S TABLE. The most secure Conclusion we can possibly draw from the Danger of unworthy Receiving, is, not to stay away, but to be engag'd from such an Apprehension, immediately to set about a wise and holy Preparation for it.

S E C T. VII.

A Concluding Exhortation to come, and to come prepared.

I Cannot conclude this ESSAY without earnestly perswading us to a constant Observance of so necessary a *Duty*. Where's our Love to our selves, where's our Obedience to CHRIST, if we take no Notice of this strict Command, of a dying Command, the dying Command of a Dear *Redeemer*? Let not any of us think to excuse our selves upon shuffling Reasons, or weak Imaginations. For 'tis neither the *Perfection* of Vertue, nor the *Guilt* of Sin, nor the Multiplicity of *Business*, nor the Pursuit of *Pleasures*, that can vindicate or justify our Absence in this Case. Persons of all Capacities, and in
all

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all Circumstances have particular Obligations to come, and must heinously sin by staying away. The *Good* ought to come, because they are well-disposed; and the *Bad*, because they have need of Mercy. The *Strong*, lest they become feeble; and the *Feeble*, that they may be made strong. Those who have *not many* Worldly Affairs, shou'd communicate, because they have leisure to prepare themselves; and those who have *abundance* of Temporal Business ought to do so, that God may sanctify and bless their Designs. We are never so perfect, as to be secure from the Fear and Danger of Falling; nor ever so far advanc'd in Goodness in this World, as not to need going on unto Perfection. Let them who have *Fears* attend, that their Hearts may be settled in the Acts of a more lively Faith; and let them attend who have *Hopes*, that they may rise to greater Degrees of an humble Confidence. Let the *broken* and *contrite* approach, that they may be comforted; and let those approach that *rejoyce* in the LORD always, that their Joy may be full. Let the *Kind* and *Charitable* come, that their Spark may be kindled into a Flame, that their Charity may never fail: and let those that are at *Enmity* with their Neighbors also come, let them only *first go and be reconciled to their Brethren, and so let them come and offer their Gift.* Who

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Who then, I beseech you, can truly say, he may be justly excused; or upon what accounts can we, dare we, presume to turn our Backs, when our LORD invites? The Fate of those who refused to come to the Supper in the *Gospel*, *Luke* 14. after they were bidden and all things were ready, is sufficient to teach us with Care and Diligence to avoid the same guilt. They all began to make such like Excuses, as we are too apt to produce for our *Neglect of Religious Duties*. One pleaded, *I have bought a piece of Ground, and I must needs go and see it*: Another declar'd, *I have bought five Yoke of Oxen, and I go to prove them*: And a third said, *I have married a Wife, and therefore I cannot come*. But none of these Pleas were accepted, the Lord's Wrath was raised at the *ungrateful Contempt* of his *sumptuous Entertainment*; and he was provoked to resolve, that none of those Men which were bidden shou'd taste of his Supper.

The Businesses, the Cares, the Pleasures they were engag'd in, were none of them *unlawful* in themselves. The purchasing of *Land* and viewing it, the buying of *Oxen* and proving them, and the marrying of a *Wife*, were all of them *Innocent* in their own Natures: and yet even these *Innocent*, these *Lawful* Concerns, when consider'd and made use of

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as *Hindrances* in the sublimer Duties of Religion, *degenerate* into Vice. *Industry* in our *Callings*, and *Justice* in our *Dealings*, and *Regularity* in our *Satisfactions*, are very necessary Duties in their proper Place and Time: but we must not for the sake of these omit attending upon God in our Prayers, in his Word, in his Sacraments. To be so closely, so constantly employ'd in the World, as to neglect *the one thing needful*, is a very dangerous *Error*, tho' we be never so honest and fair in other respects. If the Pursuit, if the Enjoyment of *Riches* will not suffer us to go to Heaven, good were it for us to have been the poorest Creatures upon Earth.

From the whole Parable, we perceive how vain and frivolous a Pretence it is, to let Temporal Considerations exclude the weightier Matters of the Law; and the sublimest Mystery of the *Gospel*. It is an easy matter for a Man to say, I will not communicate at the *Lord's Table*, because I am otherwise hindred with Worldly Business: but such Excuses are not so easily accepted and allow'd of by God. And shou'd our *Savior* deal with us (as indeed He justly may) for our ungrateful slighting of His *Royal Feast* and *Spiritual Banquet* after the same Manner, which the Master of the *Feast* used towards the
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shifting Rudeness of his doubly invited Guests, I dread to think of the *Miserable Consequences* of this excluding Punishment. Sensible, I hope, we are all of the dismal state of a deserted Soul; of the Necessity of the things which accompany Salvation: Sensible, I woud' perswade my self to such a degree, as so to pass thro' things Temporal that we finally lose, not the things Eternal. With a little *Fore-thought* and *Contrivance* Business may be so order'd, that a *Christian* may have Time to read, and pray seriously, and communicate frequently, and praise God for his Mercies; not only without the *Least Damage*, but with *Real Benefit*, even to the concerns of this Life, as well as those which have a Relation unto a better. For when God sees we contrive for our Duty, and with Diligence *Seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*; all the *Conveniences* as well as *Necessaries* of Life, together with the comfortable Enjoyment of them (which makes our Condition at least equal to that of Kings) according to his own Promise *shall be added to us.*

As I earnestly exhort to a constant *Attendance* at the LORD'S TABLE; so let us all be perswaded not only to come, but to come also with *Convenient Preparation*. Since we are in the Name of God
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invited to this *Heavenly Feast*, and have the *Marriage-garment* required by God in Holy Scripture laid before us; let us not be so *Injurious* to our selves as not to put it on, so *affronting* to God as to come without it. When a great Dinner is prepar'd by our Neighbors, and a Messenger is sent to let the Guests know all things are ready, and their Company is desired; we see what Care the Guests usually take to appear clean and decent in Habit, and to behave themselves with a becoming Respect and Gratitude to the Master, tho' the Body only is there refresh'd *with Meat that perisheth*. Oh then let us use the same *Diligence* in dressing and adorning of our Souls for the SUPPER of our LORD; where God is the *Entertainer*, and the *Banquet* is Celestial, and our Souls are fed with the *Body and Blood* of our SAVIOR CHRIST, with *Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life*.

In the Week before the *Administration* of the SACRAMENT, let us so *order* our worldly Affairs as shall be consistent with our Preparation for it; and cut off as many superfluous Cares as we can. That so we may have more time for Prayer, for Meditation, and searching into our Consciences, that so God may see we are sincere and in earnest as to matters of Religion, and do not only *perceive* Spi-
ritual

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ritual things, but are deeply *affected* with them. When our *Examination* at this season hath inform'd us, how great Sinners we are, what Crimes we have committed, what aggravating Circumstances attend those Crimes; then let us, in the bitterness of our Souls, and from the bottom of our Hearts, and upon our bended Knees, lie prostrate before GOD: And if we lift up our Voices, let it be for Mercy; and Oh that our *Cries* were answerable to our *Needs* of it! Mercy we all want, and the Gates of Mercy are here open; we may forsake our Sins, and receive a Pardon, and will not this move us? Here is the Fountain of *Blood*, where we are to bath and wash the Stains of our polluted Souls; and *will we not be made clean?* Oh! *when will it once be!* GOD loves to dwell with a *broken* and *contrite* Spirit, and there is a particular Promise, that those who *Mourn* for their Sins, *shall be comforted*; comforted with *Pardon* and *Grace*, with *Peace* and *Salvation*. And this shou'd produce a religious Care to appear with an inflamed *Love* to our SAVIOR, and a humble *Confidence* in GOD, and a *Charity* as extensive as was his Satisfaction, and a deep *Sorrow* for past Sins, and a sincere *Resolution* entirely to forsake them. These are the Qualifications of a worthy *Communicant*, and
with

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with these sacrifices God is well pleased.

Did we but know the Joys flowing from an *Union* with God; wou'd we but understand the exceeding *Unhappiness* of a *Separation* from Him; wou'd we but meditate on all the *Benefits* of *Holy Communion*, all my Intreaties wou'd be superseded, our own Thoughts wou'd be sufficiently perswasive. Let us then be perswaded but to meditate on these things, and sure I am, we shall with Vigor prepare for them, we shall eagerly *Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness*, and be truly compar'd to the *Merchant Man* in the *Gospel* seeking goodly *Pearls*; who, when he had found one *Pearl* of great Price, went and sold All that he had and bought it. From the ravishing Prospect of such Advantages, how ready shou'd we be to confess and forsake our Sins, sincerely to purpose a better Obedience; to cut off our right Hand, to pluck out our right Eye, to part with our darling Lusts; and when they tempt, to say to them Be gone, I will be no longer enslaved nor deluded by your vain and uneasy Pleasures; I have chang'd my Mind, I am going to feast with my Dear *Redeemer*, whose Service is *perfect Freedom*, and whose Favor is *better than Life it self*. What a *Blessed Sight* is it to God, to see a number of *Christians* inflam'd with a
Fervor

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Fervor of Devotion and a sacred Fire at the Altar? How acceptable must it be to our Glorified SAVIOR, to behold his *Disciples* with grateful Hearts met together to commemorate the Pledges of his *Love*? And how great must be the *Transports* in our Souls upon the Canceling of our Sins, upon the Renewing of our *Covenant*, upon the glorious *Victory* gain'd over the *World*, the *Flesh* and the *Devil*, and upon a new infused Principle and Flame of a Divine and Spiritual Life!

Whenever such Opportunities approach, let us not rob God of his *Honor*, nor our SAVIOR of our *Thanks*, nor our Souls of their *Felicity*; but let every one take up *David's* Resolution, I will wash my Hands in innocency, O *Lord*, and so will I go up to the Altar of my *God*. There let us appear as devout Penitents, with the *Publicane's* Confession in our Mouths; with *St. Peter's* Tears in our Eyes, and *Mary's* Choice in our Hearts. Thus dispos'd, and thus prepar'd for this *Angelical Feast*, it will certainly prove a *Banquet* to our Souls; and from tasting the LORD'S SUPPER in such a manner upon *Earth*, we shall be translated and admitted to sit down at the *Marriage-Supper* of the LAMB in *Heaven*.

F I N I S.